

A Day Apart: the Journey of Grace

"Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders."

- Deuteronomy 33:12

Beginning

Take some time to start the day in prayer. Ask God to help you to be open to whatever He might have for you this day. Share with God any hopes, fears, questions, or doubts that are on your mind. Throughout the day you may find it helpful to come back to God on a "meta" level: why do I resist this topic or find particular delight in this verse? But if you are having a sweet time of fellowship with the Lord, do not feel obligated to interrupt it with such thoughts!

(More suggestions for Entering In to the retreat are included in the appendix, including the palm prayer we used at the all-church retreat. All the materials here are merely prompts—take up what is helpful and disregard the rest.)

Invocation

Dear Lord, no amount of discipline can make me more like you without your grace, leading, and indwelling Spirit at work within me. Let me encounter you this day, that your love may change me. Help me to cast off my old self and live the abundant life with you. Amen.

Scripture Readings

from the NIV

Psalm 119:41-48

1 Waw

⁴¹May your unfailing love come to me, O Lord,
your salvation according to your promise;
⁴²then I will answer the one who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.
⁴³Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth,
for I have put my hope in your laws.
⁴⁴I will always obey your law,
for ever and ever.
⁴⁵I will walk about in freedom,
for I have sought out your precepts.
⁴⁶I will speak of your statutes before kings
and will not be put to shame,
⁴⁷for I delight in your commands
because I love them.
⁴⁸I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love,
and I meditate on your decrees.

Mark 1:9-18

⁹At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

¹²At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

¹⁶As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." ¹⁸At once they left their nets and followed him.

Philippians 2:12-13

¹²Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Other Readings

“Becoming the Beloved is the greatest spiritual journey we have to make....

“If it is true that we not only are Beloved, but also have to *become* the beloved; if it is true that we not only *are* children of God, but also have to *become* children of God; if it is true that we not only *are* brothers and sisters, but also have to *become* brothers and sisters ... if all that is true, how then can we get a grip on this process of becoming? If the spiritual life is not simply a way of being, but also a way of becoming, what then is the nature of this becoming?

“You are enough of a pragmatist to ask how we get from the first to the second innocence, from the first to the second childhood, from being the Beloved to fully becoming it. This is such an important question because it forces us to let go of any romanticism or idealism and to deal with the utter concreteness of our daily lives. *Becoming the Beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfolded in everything we think, say, or do.* It entails a long and painful process of appropriation or better, incarnation. As long as “being the Beloved” is little more than a beautiful thought or a lofty idea that hangs above my life to keep me from becoming depressed, nothing really changes. What is required is to become the Beloved in the commonplaces of my daily existence and, bit by bit, to close the gap that exists between what I know myself to be and the countless specific realities of everyday life. Becoming the Beloved is pulling the truth revealed to me from above down into the ordinariness of what I am, in fact, thinking of, talking about, and doing from hour to hour.

“... When our deepest truth is that we are the Beloved and when our greatest joy and peace come from fully claiming that truth, it follows that this has to become visible and tangible in the ways we eat and drink, talk and love, play and work. When the deepest currents of our life no longer have any influence on the waves at the surface, then our vitality will eventually ebb, and we will end up listless and bored even when we are busy.”

- From *Life of the Beloved*, by Henri Nouwen

“A man who is angry at God will often not listen and respond to him in prayer. Consequently, he may not pray at all. Rarely, though, will he say to himself that he is not praying because he is angry at God. Instead, he may tell himself that he does not pray because he has no time. ... He is too angry to listen to God, but believes that he is too undisciplined or too busy to pray.

“Sometimes, therefore, the reasons we give ourselves for not praying are not the real reasons. Often enough the real reasons will be attitudes in ourselves that we find hard to accept. Who wants to know, for instance, that she is angry at God, dubious about her marriage, or deeply afraid of life? Yet, if personal prayer is to be frequent and tolerable, we will have to let ourselves increasingly communicate our real attitude to God. ‘Transparent’

is an apt description of the attitude of openness that develops as we let the Word of God speak to us and let our response to that Word represent ourselves and our attitudes more fully.”

- *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* by William Barry & Willian Connolly

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

- St. Francis of Assisi

Lord it was you
who created the heavens.

Lord it was your hand
that put the stars in their place.

Lord it is your voice
that commands the morning,
even oceans and their waves will bow at your feet.

Lord, who am I compared with your glory, oh Lord?
Lord, who am I compared with your majesty?

I am your beloved, your creation, and you love me as I am.
You have called me chosen for your kingdom, unashamed to call me your own,
I am your beloved.

- *Your Beloved*, by Vineyard

Themes for Reflection

As you read, reflect, write, and pray, remember to pause, wait, and sit still along the way. The stillness may be the most important part of all.

You may want to choose one or more of the following to guide your day, or reflect with God on one of the readings (see also the Appendix).

On the Table

Rama shared this visual during our all-church retreat: a harried woman arrives early in the morning for spiritual direction before her full day of classes and work. When she comes in, her hands are full of keys and coffee cup and all manner of items related to getting out the door just in time, which she deposits on the table before sinking into a chair with a sigh. From this vantage point she sees all her things crowding the small table which contains a candle and a cross. She apologizes and hurries to remove the clutter of her life from that sacred space. But Rama says wait, no, don't move it, that's exactly why we're here: not to clear away enough space for God, but to find God in the midst of it.

God invites us to to keep the reality of what's going on in our lives on the table and discover the extraordinary in the ordinary.

What's on your table? Consider drawing a simple picture or making a list in your journal of the objects that represent those things which fill your life right now.

In what areas of your life do you identify with the woman's need to clear things away from the sacred space in order to attend to God? In what areas are you familiar with finding God in the midst?

Share your thoughts and desires with God. Do you sense any response or invitation? Assume this is a two-way conversation and be open to further insight beyond this day.

Lectio Divina

Read Mark 1:9-18 (found in the Scripture Readings). Read it through slowly several times.

- 1) On your first reading, see if there is a word or phrase which stands out to you.
- 2) As you read the passage again, focus in on that word or phrase and ask God if He has anything to say to you regarding it. Or perhaps something unrelated will come up just because you are in a posture of openness.
- 3) Read the passage a third time. Do you sense any invitation from God, big or small? Respond to anything he has brought up or invited you into.
- 4) Read the passage one last time. Allow the words to simply wash over you. Give yourself permission to rest in God and in His word.

Looking back and looking forward

A simple way to look back and look forward is to sit with these three questions, one by one, and answer them with God. You may wish to write them in your journal as well, but do consciously discuss your thoughts with God, giving thanks and asking for further insight.

- What are you thankful for?
- What are you looking forward to?
- To what do you need to say goodbye?

You may also want to look at the Prayer of Examen (see appendix) if you'd like more structure.

Psalm (courtesy of Russell)

When read straight through, Psalm 119 may seem repetitive and directionless, an overly-long rant about delighting in God's law. But focusing imaginatively on one section, you can appreciate how each has a subtly different flavor.

One way to creatively engage with scripture is to make up a story inspired by a passage, or fleshing out the circumstances in more detail (this is called "midrash" in the Jewish tradition). Psalm 119 provides rich opportunity for this because of the wealth of detail and the wide range of emotion.

Like action? Heth (57-64) has somehow gotten tied up with ropes, and Nun (105-112) is relying on God's direction to navigate a minefield. Rags to riches? Daleth (25-32) starts out lying exhausted in the dirt but ends up running in freedom. Speaking truth to power? Gimel (17-24), Waw (41-48), Mem (97-104), and Shin (161-168) all find that God gives them the confidence to stand up to authority.

Pick one of the sections (each starts at one more than a multiple of 8, if your translation doesn't give the headings like the NIV does) and create a story or picture or comic strip inspired by it.

Benediction

(Suggested prayer for the end of your time of silence and/or debrief time.)

Lord, I am your Beloved. By your grace, let me more fully become your Beloved within the reality of my day-to-day life. Amen.