

Morning Mediation January 25, 2021

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Luke 4:4-19

This week I want us to lean into Luke’s gospel. The above words happen right after Jesus’ temptation that we dove into a few weeks ago. Notice how the Spirit continues to drive and dance into the story. The Spirit is an active actor/actress in Jesus’ life, this will continue in the book of Acts (which many scholars believe the same author of Luke writes as a sequel). The Spirit prompts, pulls, pushes, provokes, and persuades Jesus back the region of Galilee, where he grew up. How does the Spirit do that? What does that look like or sound like or feel like?

Those are great questions. But there is not, in my experience, a one-size fits all answer to it for everyone who will read this. Sometimes the Spirit is peaceful...sometimes passionate...sometimes persistent...sometimes patient. The Spirit can wear a thousand disguises. But, what tethers and ties all this together is that being grounded and guided by the Spirit is being fully alive and awake. Often, it is easy to get caught up in the past or future rather than the present moment. Jesus seems to stay open to the Spirit whether in the desert being tempted or traveling back to the place he called, “Home”. I think one way to practice such openness is by pushing the pause button several times a day. Pause after you read this to reflect and respond to what stirred within you. Pause before lunch to consider the way you are connected to countless people who made the meal you are about to eat happen (earth, farmers, truck drivers, grocery store workers). Pause in the afternoon to see the way the sunlight is shining a light on the grass outside. Work in pauses into your life rather than rushing and running and racing on to the next thing. Right now, put in your calendar and set an intention to pause today.

Prayer: God whose first language is silence, help me find moments of sacred stillness to feel Your stirring Spirit in me. Amen.

Morning Mediation January 26, 2021

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ He said to them, “Doubtless you will

quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Well, that went south in a hurry. Talk about a story taking an unexpected twist and turn that can cause your head to spin! To recap here, yesterday we heard how Jesus fame was spreading. People were liking his posts on Facebook, his LinkedIn profile was getting lots of attention, and the speaking requests were pouring into his agent. While we who are convinced that Jesus is someone who follow, who captures our hearts and sings to our souls, lets step back for just a moment – pause – and ask: why?

"Well," you reason, "He is Jesus."

Got it. But wait, we are saying that after reading and hearing the whole story about the angels at his birth and healing and teaching and death and resurrection. But much of that hadn't happened yet. We don't know if his neighbors knew about the manger or shepherds. Maybe they just knew that he was healing and could give a good talk. So, why again is a carpenter whose childhood, at least within the gospels didn't seem to deserve much reflection upon, suddenly start gaining attention and affirmation?

Um, maybe his halo started shining brighter?

Here is what we know. Jesus went down to the river to pray with John. He waded in the water. The Spirit blessed him and affirmed his belovedness. Note that the Gospels are unclear if anyone overheard any of the Spirit's words. Then, right after that, Jesus goes off the grid. He doesn't post his morning meditations while being tempted in the wilderness. For forty days no one hears from him. Then, Jesus comes back and starts a speaking tour in Galilee that gets attention. We don't know what he said in those initial sermons, we don't have the transcriptions. Luke calls us to a moment when he had returned home, goes to the Sabbath service, reads scripture about God's liberating love. And people respond by saying, "Amen." And then, Jesus appears to get angry? Why? What in the name of the good news is going on here?

Maybe there was a history here between Jesus and his hometown congregation. Maybe when they referred to him as, "Joseph's son" it tweaked something in him. Jesus wanted them to see him as sent by God, not just the neighbor next door. Maybe Jesus felt disrespected or discounted?

We don't know. There are countless untold stories in-between each word of Scripture.

I do, however, find it fascinating that the crowd is about to toss and throw Jesus off a cliff and he parts the mob like Moses before the Red Sea. This is a beautifully strange story that should cause us to pause.

Pause to ponder our own relationships with our hometowns. When was the last time you were back to the place you grew up? Or maybe you never left. When was the last time you were frustrated because people saw you one way and you saw yourself another? When was the last time you found a situation being escalated and grow out-of-control – not just on the news – but something you were a part of?

To let these words sing and settle in your heart this day and come back to it each time you pause today.

Prayer: Pausing and pondering God, help me step into this story in ways that speak and sing to my story today. Amen.

Morning Mediation January 27, 2021

³¹ He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath. ³² They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. ³³ In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ³⁴ “Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” ³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm. ³⁶ They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, “What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!” ³⁷ And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

As we lean in and listen to this part of Luke, we know Jesus was on a preaching and teaching tour. His words were awakening the Spirit, stirring the soul, causing the congregation to shout, “Amen” and thunderous applause. And we have only the manuscript of the sermon in his hometown. Otherwise, we really don’t know the content of what Jesus is saying. Eventually, we will hear the sermon on the plain. So maybe he was testing and trying out early versions of that sermon?

I wish we knew. But, then again, perhaps the point isn’t what he said, but how he said it and how he made people feel alive and awake to God with them and for them and for others.

In this part of Luke we get Jesus’ first healing.

Notice that the unclean demon is the first one to witness to Jesus as the “Holy One of God.” Lean into that tension – that even though people think Jesus is a swell guy who really seems to be able to string a series of words together; it is a demon who is the first to testify to the truth that Jesus has a sacred relationship with God.

The religious folk seem to miss the moment, the movement, and mystery of what is happening.

I wonder sometimes if that is not only true then and there, but here and now. Am I missing what God is up to? Am I busy saying, "Amen," but not letting God fully have control of my heart and whole life? Am I caught up in the Spirit only to the point that I don't have to change and can still cling to my plotting and planning?

Pause with me, lean into Luke, let this story interrupt you and interpret your story. What response, reaction, reasoning, and rational do you hear in your heart about this story? What sermon stirs in you as you hold the tension that a demon is the one to witness to Jesus while the religious folk are not being transformed in the same way?

While such questions are uncomfortable, they help me pause in a way that doesn't keep me complacent where I am. They challenge how I can use religion to baptize my own beliefs, rather than let Jesus' presence change my whole life.

To be silent. To let that Spirit interrupt and intercede and inhabit this space with me. That is the power of the pause that can change everything.

Prayer: God, calm and quiet the part of myself that think I have this all figured out with a healing presence that can continue to change my heart/life. Amen.

Morning Mediation January 28, 2021

³⁸ After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her. ³⁹ Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

Two healing stories back-to-back. We met Simon last Sunday. In that passage we learned more about his backstory: that he was a fisherman and that Jesus saw something in Simon that Simon couldn't see in himself. But before Simon was called to follow Jesus, he apparently invited Jesus over for brunch. Simon, who we hear is married, has a family member who is sick. While we can skate right past this detailed, but it is as true as each of our lives.

In your story, you have had moments and memories of family being sick.

In the last year, we know that over 400,000 Americans and 2 million brothers and sisters worldwide have had a family member die from the coronavirus. That doesn't count deaths due to cancer or car accidents or violence. Grief is woven into us. Recently, I read this poem/prayer by Jan Richardson from 2017 entitled, "Irresistible Blessing"

This blessing has been walking for a long time, traveling with no map, no signpost, no guide. It has been aching with a heart unbelievably broken and unimaginably lost and immeasurably tired. This blessing does not have it all together. This blessing sometimes wakes up anxious and afraid. This blessing had to be quiet, had to let itself sit in stillness and sorrow, had to let itself stop and rest to

allow for joy to become imaginable again and grace to become believable again and the presence of love to become inescapable again. This blessing knows you carry your own sorrow, your own grief. It knows the weariness that visits you, the questions that attend your road. It knows, too, how you keep turning yourself toward mystery, how you keep turning yourself toward hope, how you keep turning yourself toward this world with the beautiful stubbornness by which a way is made. And so this blessing is glad to finally cross your path. This blessing has been waiting for you. This blessing has been watching for you. This blessing has been wanting to see your face, to speak your name, to offer thanks. This blessing meets you with glad welcome. This blessing meets you with persistent hope. This blessing meets you with fierce love that is ancient and present. This blessing comes to you with heart impossibly open and irresistibly drawn and infinitely grateful for the blessing that you bear, for the blessing that you are.

I invite you to pause and re-read these words several times today. Carry these words within you. Let them sing to your soul.

Prayer: God let your word of blessing find me in my need for healing and surround me every hour this day. Amen.

Morning Mediation January 29, 2021

⁴⁰ As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them. ⁴¹ Demons also came out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah. ⁴² At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them. ⁴³ But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." ⁴⁴ So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.

We wind down and wrap up this week where we began – with a pause. With Jesus going to a deserted place. Jesus gets a few moments for rest and renewal before the crowd catches up to him. He doesn't get a full vacation. He doesn't get the full spa treatment and to sit on the beach with a beverage in his hand. He gets a few moments.

He gets a pause.

Today also marks the winding down and wrapping up of the first month of 2021 – which has felt a lot like 2020. I think today might be the last day we can return this year in exchange for another, check the back of your receipt for the full return policy, exclusions will apply.

We need a pause.

To be open to the Spirit on this road we are making.

To sense God's grace guiding, grounding, stirring, shaking.

To let the sacred attend, heal our souls which are aching.

To let God get a word in edgewise on the path we are taking.

Pause in the less-than-perfectness of this moment, let the holy awaken us to a movement beyond what we can comprehend or control.

I pray today you might have moments of healing and hope; of God's grace guiding you every step of the way. And may God's love be with you now more than ever. Amen.