

“My Life Makes a Difference”

Luke 9:28-36

In the midst of Jesus’ teaching and healing, every once in a while, he’ll retreat to a mountaintop for spiritual renewal, for alone time with God, for a spiritual experience, for a time to pray.

If his disciples were lucky, he would take a few of them along. Peter, James, and John were invited to come along. You and I are invited to come along. The problem is that we’re not always willing to take the time to get out of the mainstream of our life and open ourselves to experience the spiritual presence of God.

Yet we know in our hearts that following Christ involves both an external and internal journey. Here in Divinity, we’re pretty good at the external journeys. We serve and love others in so many ways through all of our ministries. We’re really good at following Jesus’ example of serving, teaching, healing, and generally responding to the needs of others. By following Jesus, we have found the peace of knowing that our lives and church make a difference.

But the internal journey of prayer and opening ourselves to the spiritual presence of God can be much more challenging. The internal journey becomes more meaningful every time we worship together, every time we hear God’s Word, every time we celebrate the presence of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, and every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer together.

When we’re talking about our internal journey, the Lord’s Prayer that I pray with Divinity folks almost daily, can be a very scary prayer.

Because when we pray that “God’s will be done”, we’re saying, “alright God. I’m prepared to do your will”. Yet most of us want to do our will because most of us are control freaks to some degree.

We want the security of knowing that we have a house, we have a job, our children and grandchildren are protected, and we’ve got a savings account. And God says that’s not going to bring the security you really need in your life. God says to take an hour to come and worship me. God says to take an hour and come with me up to the mountain to pray. God says out of the cloud of our spiritual experience, “This is my son, my chosen; listen to him!”

When I have visited with older people in their homes or nursing homes, they have become accustomed to the background noise of the T.V. When I ask if I can turn it off during our visit, some didn’t even realize it was on. But how much better to pray the Lord’s Prayer together, to hear Jesus’ words of blessing the bread and the wine without background noise!

Silence is not boring. Silence gives us the opportunity to focus on Jesus and listen to him.

Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and all the prophets went out to the desert to get away from all the distractions and to be alone with God.

Jesus took 3 of his disciples up a mountain to be alone with God, to talk to Moses and Elijah, to be transfigured, to hear God’s voice telling them to listen to him. Jesus’ life and their lives would make a difference. He would deliver us from the finality of death to eternity.

When I’m visiting with someone in the hospital and you ask for my opinion on whether or not to have open heart surgery, whether or not to continue cancer treatments, whether or not to

put in a feeding tube, whether or not to do or not to do something; I tell you that you need to talk to your spouse, your family, your doctor, and most of all, talk to God.

Spend some time in silence and pray. The only way you will find peace with your decision, the only way you will find peace with God is in silence. Pray. Listen.

The message of God throughout scripture is to spend time alone, to be quiet, and to listen. “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him. And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silence and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen”.

Another reason why we tend to avoid alone time with God is so we don't have to deal with our internal, spiritual journey. It's much easier for us to do the external stuff of following Jesus. It's often fun to join with a group of Divinity brothers and sisters to serve a meal either here or at the Crisis Center, to tutor Parma Park children, to provide food for our pantry, for our youth to go back to Brooklyn this summer to serve folks there.

But to grow spiritually, it can be scary to be alone with God. St. Paul in his 14 letters in our New Testament is haunted with the sense of his own sin, especially his persecution of Christians. Martin Luther was haunted with the sense of his own sin and his fear of never being good enough.

After a lot of alone time with God both St. Paul and Luther learned their relationship with God was not dependent on their righteous actions and their obedience to the law. They learned they would never be good enough.

When we spend along time with God and all those past sins come popping up to the surface even though we had buried them deep, we learn that we never were and never will be good enough.

But to learn that, we have to take time for that inward journey. We have to take time for that internal, spiritual journey when we open ourselves to the spiritual presence of God.

Then, over time, we come to believe that it's O.k. to not be good enough. It's O.K. to have been a rough-living fisherman or a dishonest tax collector. It's O.K. to have abandoned your family or friends. It's O.K. for a pastor or any of us to have made mistakes and hurt people along the way.

Whatever the sin that pops up from our past during our alone time with God, we confess it, we own it, and we accept the forgiveness that is gifted to us through our faith in Christ.

But like our external journey in following Christ, we have to keep at it, over and over again. Confession and forgiveness during our internal journey is not a one time thing.

We get better at it, the further along we are by taking more time to alone with God and to grow our relationship with him.

No matter our sins, our faith grows stronger that we are saved from all our sins by God's grace through our faith in the crucified and resurrected Son of God – Jesus Christ.

God does this for each of us.

Abraham lived in a culture that believed in many gods. We live in a culture that believes in many gods. Yet Abraham listened to the One God and was blessed with two sons. When God asks him to sacrifice his second son, he's ready to do it because of his faith. God stops him. God doesn't stop himself. He sacrifices his only Son to save us from ourselves, to save us from our sin.

Even if God asked us during the alone time of our internal journeys, none of us would kill our own son. We certainly sacrifice our children at the altar of war, from the evil of drug

addiction, in car and other accidents. If we could stop it, we wouldn't allow any of our children to die.

God could have stopped the death of his son on Good Friday. Jesus knew it when he was alone with God in the garden. "If it be your will, take this cup from me." "Thy will be done".

How can we ignore this gift of forgiveness for all of our sins? Why should we bury our sins and try to ignore them?

Spend some time on your internal journey during the Lenten season beginning on Ash Wednesday. Spend some time on your mountain, in your alone place, in prayer and confession. Listen. Receive the gifts of forgiveness and faith.

Then come down from the mountain and continue on your external journey of servanthood and sharing your love and forgiveness with others.

I believe that my life makes a difference. I believe that your life makes a difference.

Thanks be to God!

May the peace of God...

#553 – Christ, Whose Glory fills the Skies