

Lent 1, Spiritual Practices

Class Notes

February 24, 2012

What are spiritual practices and why do spiritual practices at all? They are actions combined with a mental and spiritual movements. Think of them as different languages – all of which God speaks. The starting point today is for us to begin by telling stories. I invite you to share the story of a time you felt close to God or felt God's presence in your life.

Looking at the Litany of Penitence (BCP 267) I noticed that the stanzas are formed into four groups with different congregational responses. The first two – we are asking for God's mercy. Mercy is the bridge between where we are, and God hopes we live. Picture a bridge – any kind of bridge. Write down the type or description of what bridge came to mind.

Fasting:

Fasting may be one of the most well-known and common practices during Lent. I was asked this question recently and it stopped me in my thinking tracks about fasting.

"What difference to the world will my fasting make?"

I had never heard that question before connected with the practice of fasting. While I wonder how to answer that question I wonder where it will take you. Ask yourself that question and see where it takes you. Jot down any words or thoughts that come. We will have time to share them next week.

I want to present one type of fasting with a meal. I will describe it to you and ask you to set it up and try it at least twice between now and next Wednesday. Please take notes about your experience. We will share some of these stories next week as you much as you are willing.

Fasting with a meal:

- Pick a meal or a snack for this exercise that you can eat alone or with someone else to practice with you.
- Set the table nicely – napkin, utensils, dish with food, beverage.
- Take reading materials off the table, turn off the TV, do not listen to music or podcasts or news.
- Say grace or another prayer of thanksgiving. ("Dear Lord, make this food your feast" AMEN. is what I usually say.)
- Eat your meal one mouthful or bite at a time. In between bites put your utensils or cup down and rest your hands. Chew and swallow noticing the motions of eating and noticing the food textures and flavors. As you eat notice aromas, what you hear while you are eating and chewing. Notice how your body feels, especially your stomach.
- Stop whenever you have had enough.
- Write down as much as you are able about the experience.
- We will have time to share about this next week.

Breath:

Breath is used to support several different Spiritual Practices. We will touch on them in the coming weeks but today we will become acquainted with Breath by itself. Read all these directions and then try the practice so you don't have to refer back to what is written here.

- Begin by either closing your eyes or looking down slightly so that you are in essence staring at nothing, sort of daydreaming.
- Sit comfortably in your chair with your head over your neck. Your neck straight and stacked over your spine. Your spine more or less straight, your hips feeling the seat supporting your torso.
- Notice what your regular breathing is like – how air enters your body and leaves your body.
- Notice if any part of your body is tense or locked or straining. (e.g., furrowed brow, shoulders trying to touch your ear lobes,
- Jaw clenched, legs, and feet tight or clenched.)
- Now inhale to the count of three then pause with your lungs full before you exhale to the count of three. Pause with your lungs empty before inhaling again and continuing the breath-counting practice.
- After you have tried the three count a number of times then increase the number to 6 for your inhale and exhale. Continue to pause when your lungs are full and when your lungs are empty.
- Write down what you notice. What you notice in your body, and in your spirit and in your mind.

Haiku:

One form of Japanese poetry that is accessible because it is short and simple to form. It is constructed by counting syllables and it is three lines long. Line one is 5 syllables, line two is 7 syllables, and line 3 is 5 syllables.

Using your bridge word or words to start write a haiku incorporating any other words you want. Because they are not long, and syllable count is the driving structure unusual word combinations come up. These unusual combinations invite us to think differently about the images and ideas in the words. Write at least one haiku but try writing others just to experiment more with this possible spirit and mind opener.