

SERMON
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Spiritual Practices: Dwelling in the Word (Lent 3)

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2 Timothy 3:14-17, Luke 5:1-11

“All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16).

That is what Paul writes to Timothy. He is writing to urge Timothy to stay faithful, and to be bold for Christ – and in doing so, he reminds him of how the Holy Scriptures are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

In some ways, those words ‘rebuking’ and ‘correcting’ have been over emphasized by some Christian traditions, and perhaps the words “*scripture is God-breathed*” have been overlooked.

Think about that phrase for a moment. “*Scripture is God-breathed.*”

So often scripture is only used as a tool for imparting new information, or to confirm an existing belief. But when we think about Scripture as the breath of God speaking to us – it encourages us to stop and listen to what God might be saying. When we read scripture in a way that invites the Holy Spirit to open us up, then we hear a biblical text that is truly “Living Word”.

To read scripture in this way, is not a bible study. It is not putting scripture into the hands of ordained ministers, or even student ministers; it is not listening to theological interpretations, and biblical history. Instead, it is attending and discerning scripture in a humble, tentative, and open way, willing to listen to what God might be saying to us individually or collectively. It is dwelling in scripture.

Dwelling in scripture is an ancient Christian practice that began with Benedictine monks. It comes from the Latin term *Lectio Divina*, meaning “divine reading.” It describes a ways of reading scripture whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda, & we open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. It is a spiritual practice that promotes our relationship & communion with God.

For many of us it might be a new spiritual practice. You might find that when you open your heart to listen in this way, some of your preconceived thoughts and beliefs might be challenged. You might find that you read the same passage repeatedly, that God has something different to say each time. When we dwell in the same scripture repeatedly, the text begins to live in us, as we live in the text. Dwelling creates space for the Spirit to open up our imagination, so that scripture becomes the Living Word, not just an historical text or a book of rules and regulations. Scripture becomes alive, because God is still speaking to us.

Dwelling in the Word has four separate steps: read; meditate; pray; contemplate.

We will read the passage through twice out loud – you can follow along with the insert in your bulletin, or just close your eyes and listen.

After the first reading, we will pause to reflect silently on the scripture.

Before the second reading, I will ask you some questions to guide your listening.

After the second reading, I will give you some time to individually ponder the questions – pencils are provided in the pews if you want to write anything.

And then, I will invite you to share what the Spirit is saying to you with your neighbor sitting next to you or near you.

(prayer)

Before second reading ask:

- Where do you stop?
- Are there words, phrases, ideas which grasp you?
- How do you think the Spirit of God might be nudging you?

John 13:1-17 New International Version (NIV)

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

How does Dwelling work?

- Choose one passage. We've provided a few already for download below.
- Have two people (male/female) read the entire passage out loud.
- Before the second reading ask people to be open to the Spirit through these questions:
 - As the text is read a second time, where do you stop?
 - Are there words, phrases, ideas which grasp you?
 - How do you think the Spirit of God might be nudging you?
- After the text is read again invite people to ponder the questions.
- Following several minutes of silence ask people to pair off with someone in the room and answer the questions.

- Each gives the other 2 minutes and listens to where the other has stopped and how they have responded to one of the questions.
- **Reflecting in a group of three:** The important thing to remember when listening and reporting out in a triad is that everyone is heard and everyone's thoughts are expressed. It may be helpful to decide before reporting out who will express the thoughts of each. For instance, Person A reports on Person B, Person B reports on Person C, and Person C reports on Person A. In this, each person in the triad is listening intently and reporting out.
- Invite people to share with the broader group, what they have heard their partner say. This is difficult! Many people will default to reporting what they said instead of reporting what their partner said. However, this is an important way in which we practice listening.