

So it is Christ the King Sunday, the end of the Christian year, since next Sunday is Advent, the preparatory weeks for Christmas, Jesus birth. In the reading from Revelation, we see Christ in risen glory. In the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus saying to Pilate “My kingdom is NOT of this world,” which will be my focus this morning.

Many times we hear the saying “out of this world!” Jesus, in the Gospel of John is often critical of the ways of “the world” and the rulers of this world. At an obvious level, this can refer to material things of the world, the tendency toward consumerism. Worldly ways can also refer to power dynamics, that might makes right; Jesus is in opposition to such things. We can think of Jesus’ otherworldly ways as turning many things upside down: the last will be first, the humble will be exalted, changes in society are implied.

But I’d like to pause at this time to meditate on another meaning of a kingdom “not of this world,” to meditate on the “heavenly” or other-worldly aspect of Kingdom. The principal characteristics of Jesus, like his peacemaking, his grace, his truth, do not come naturally to us; they are things we have to cultivate, over time, with practice... and with PRAYER! And by prayer, I mean much more than rational words... I mean something like “sighs too deep for words” as the apostle Paul says. I mean the way that Jesus often went apart early in morning in the *silence*. I mean the MEDITATION aspect of Prayer, time in *silence*, time with sighs too deep for words. Let’s consider meditation as perhaps the deepest form of prayer. Let me share some of my own experience with meditation, apologies if you already heard this.

I grew up in the Congregational church, and heard many wonderful prayers, by the minister and an occasional Sunday school teacher. I felt something very special in worship, in the music, in the prayers, but don’t recall much *teaching* about how to pray or meditate ... so when a group came to town in the mid-70’s, offering classes in meditation at the local library, I thought why not?... could

be interesting, and I always like to learn. Besides, other seniors in High school were reporting that it was a good experience! It was the movement of Transcendental Meditation, TM, with a modest fee for about 3 classes on meditation.

With their method of inner chanting of a mantra, I *did* find I was able to “transcend” this world for a time, to find an inner peace that was deeper than any *thinking* about peace. But I also felt a little nervous about the strange language of the mantras, about what kind of Hindu religion I might be practicing. So I went to a Christian monastery to ask a leader about my experience, and he assured me that Christians also meditate, using Latin or Hebrew words in the chanting (Think of Gregorian chants, or more recently Taizee songs). I reveled in the idea and truth that I did not have to use the Hindu words given to me by the TM group, but that I could choose any comforting word that I liked. I found that a daily practice for 10-20 minutes surely reduced tension and anxiety in my life. I recall it as most helpful, especially in my college years under the intense pressure of being a pre-med student. I really looked forward to my meditation times! I have been to workshops on “centering prayer” from the Catholic Church, just another language for meditation, as is the phrase “contemplative” prayer. Quiet meditation, is indeed a universal experience, not only for monks or at silent retreats, but a daily possibility to help us live more at peace with ourselves and others.

Meister Eckhart was a 13th century German theologian and mystic who spoke most elegantly about the “other-wordly” experience. Let me share a few words from sermons by Meister Eckhart: *As the heavens are everywhere remote from the earth, so should the soul be remote from all earthly things. The heavens are out of space and out of time. Nothing corporeal is found there. Therefore, if the soul is to know God, it must know God outside time and place. If the soul is to know God, it must forget itself and lose itself. Man is*

unaware of God because his taste is so spoiled by feeding on earthly things (Think consumerism and materialism). *The person who abides in God's love must renounce himself and all the world.* (echoing Jesus' saying that we should deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, and his saying to a particular rich man that we should not be tied to our material belongings, but be willing to sell all to follow him.) Yes, Jesus definitely advocated living a life focused on other-worldly things, on heavenly attitudes and behaviors, attitudes of the heart - like love, peace, compassion, forgiveness, etc.

So the disciples of Jesus ask him to teach them how to pray, and naturally Jesus starts with some other-worldly words: Start by relating to God as "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed/holy be thy name" ...contacting God, addressing God, communing with God. Jesus' opening lines show the other-worldly aspect of a God or Spirit that is beyond us, totally other. What I'm getting at is how to pray very deeply, in a meditative fashion.

God has many names, in the Bible, and in many cultures. Names for God in the Bible: Adonai Eloheynu (Lord our God), El Shaddai (God Almighty), Yahweh/Jehovah, (I AM or I Will Be), or simply Holy One (like our choir anthem by G.F. Handel: "Holy Art Thou ...who wert and art and art to come," (who was and is and is to come), the Alpha and Omega (the beginning and the end), Abba, and Emmanuel. People often remember that Jesus is said to have addressed God as Abba (intimate name like dad or daddy). Most scholars agree that Jesus spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew, so the opening words "Our Father" were really Abwoon (note the sound Ab... like Abba. "Ahhh" is so very common as a divine sound (think of Ah-Ohm, and of Shalom!) Ahhh is considered a primal sound, often uttered when there are no words. And the "bwoon" of the Aramaic can mean "giving birth." Thus Abwoon can mean Creator, birthing One, or Father-birther, or Father-mother.

Let's end with a little practicum on meditation. We'll start with my little song called Be Still, inserting sounds of the Divine name or short prayers, and then move into just a couple minutes of silence, experiencing more quietness or stillness, as we continue hear the sounds in our heads.

***Be Still and Know that I Am God....

***Follow me beside the waters still...

***Emmanuel, Our God with us

***Adonai, Eloheynu (Hebrew: Lord our God)

***Abwoon, d'bwash'maya (Aramaic: Our Father, who art in heaven)

***Be Still and Know that I Am God, Be Still...

(2 minutes of silence)

The Beauty of this kind of sound meditation (or chanting) is that you can really use any words or short prayer that you like. It is the repetitive nature, the chanting, that helps us to transcend many earthly problems and anxieties. Don't worry, it is not escapist/ostrich behavior; our duties and conflicts will be waiting for us when we return! But we will be calmer and more focused to deal with them. We all can find a time and place in the day for some private, solitary meditation, I'm sure. Chanting helps us to transcend this world, to enter more fully into the harmony, peace, and glory of our heavenly king, whose kingdom is "not of this world." Amen.