

Group Journal Week of 9/7/08



RE-Connecting

- Informal Sharing
- Welcome to New Members and sharing of why we are here.
 - To Be Companions for Each Other – friends with whom we break bread – sharing our journey
 - To Hold one another accountable to the Disciplines of Spiritual Growth
 - Pray out loud for one another
 - Share openly and honestly our hurts, hopes, questions and comments
 - Hold one another's sharing as the confidences of a friend.
- Simple Prayer re-connecting ourselves with God.

Exploring God Within Us

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:27, 31 (NRSV)

A fundamental chord in the symphony of our faith is that we are reflections of God. God created us in God's own image. Therefore, we, unlike any other creature on earth, have a special kinship to God. We have something within us that goes beyond human. There is something about us that is "of God", divine and holy.

Whether we are men or women, we have something of God in our lives. Unfortunately, we cannot simply describe God and look for that quality within ourselves. We can only know God in the negative. We can only describe God by what God is not. We can say very little about God other than God is not like us. Even when we think we are saying something positive about God, such as God is love, we are really saying that God is not human love, but God's own kind of love.

The ancients used the word "other" to describe God. We use the more modern translation of that idea, holy. But other and holy mean exactly the same thing. Holiness means set apart, not like us. God is the Holy Other in our lives.

How then can we come to see the God within us? This will be our task for the next few weeks.

1. Name some of the ways that you are similar to your parents or brothers and sisters? Physically? Emotionally? Intellectually? Socially?
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2. These are the ways that you understand your kinship to your immediate family. You acquire them through your genes, the time you spend with them, and the stories that link your lives together. How do you reflect your “God likeness” and how did you acquire that “God-likeness?”

3. Since God is “Holy Other” and unlike us, then how do we separate out our natural characteristics and our Godly characteristics? (Hint: God did not create any other creature in God’s image. Those things that distinguish us from other living things may be reflections of the God’s presence in our lives.”

Suggestion: Traditionally, contemplative prayer enables us to get in touch with the God within us. Contemplative prayer allows us to sit and wait upon the presence of God. Through it we have the opportunity to be touched by this inner Spirit in unique ways. We will be having a Centering Prayer Workshop to help people learn the basics of contemplative prayer. If you want to get in touch with the Holy Presence within, I encourage you to sign up and attend.

Sharing

- Accountability
 - I have been faithful this week by ...

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- I have struggled this week with...
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- Intercessory Prayer
 - Concerns for others
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- Concerns for our church
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- Concerns for our community
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- Concerns for ourselves
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- Sharing our hopes and dreams for the week ahead

- Close with the Companions Circle of prayer by offering a prayer of thanks from each person for each person before sharing together the words, “We depart in peace. Amen”

Group Journal Week of 9/14/08



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Exploring God Within Us

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalms 63:1

This Psalm speaks of a heart that is yearning for God's holy presence. The middle East is a land of vast deserts with the occasional oasis or river. Life clung to these sources of water. While food was always scarce, water was an even more precious commodity. It was the absolute necessity for life in a desert.

Thirst is a realization that we need something beyond our own selves in order to survive and thrive. Nothing can satisfy this thirst but water. In a desert, water can only come by the gift of the creator.

This thirsting leads us to weariness, a fainting flesh. Fainting is a complete loss of control. Thirst awakens in us a realization that our very lives are beyond our control. That we live in constant need of the renewing waters of faith each and every day.

Our lives are lived in a dry and weary land. We need the constant presence of God like water that sustains us as we travel through such hostile places. We cannot provide what we need. We can only depend upon the presence of God within us to satisfy this thirst. The most important prerequisite for seeking spiritual health is to acknowledge that we need God and that we ache for God's presence in our lives.

We have all had an itch that we simply could not reach. It may be in the middle of our back or under a cast. These itches are the most irritating of all. In fact, we kind of like having an itch we can reach because it feels "soooo goooooood" when we scratch it. But an "un-scratchable" itch is torture.

The same thing can be said of thirst. A cool drink of water on a hot day makes the thirst that preceded it something to celebrate. But when we have the same thirst when no water is available, it can be cruel indeed.

In what way is that fainting flesh, the thirsting after God a blessing? (Hint: When we are physically thirsty, we will seek out a source of water. That thirst may be the only thing that keeps us moving in search of that desert oasis.)

If we could supply our own water for our thirsting soul, would we ever seek out God?

When prayer renews our spirit, we experience the inner presence of God. The Holy Other within quenches our thirst. We discover that God is with us, or rather “within us.” Without that thirst we would not have sought out God in prayer nor experienced the blessing of God’s cup of “cool water” for a parched and weary spirit.

Name moments when you felt the Holy Presence offering you that cup of cool water.

Are there moments or concerns in your life that are “un-scratchable”? How might you seek out God’s presence within to help you with them?

□ Accountability

- I have been faithful this week by ...

- I have struggled this week with...

□ Intercessory Prayer

- Concerns for others

- Concerns for our church

- Concerns for our community

- Concerns for ourselves

- Sharing our hopes and dreams for the week ahead

- Close with the Companions Circle of prayer by offering a prayer of thanks from each person for each person before sharing together the words, “We depart in peace. Amen”

Group Journal
Week of 9/21/08



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Exploring God Within Us

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Matthew 14:28-31

Has your “want to” ever exceeded your “can do”? Have you ever wanted to do something so badly that you gave it a try but you did not have what it took to succeed? This is Peter’s situation there on the Sea of Galilee. His “want to: was not equal to his “can do”.

Peter wanted to believe that he could walk on the water. And, in fact, he could as long as he stayed focused on the voice of Jesus calling him forward. But his fear distracted his attention away from Jesus he began to sink. As the water crept up his legs his fear blossomed into a full panic. In that moment, he cried out to Jesus who reached out, reconnected with him and pulled him from his fears.

Something was missing on the inside. He lost touch with the God within him – his faith became corroded by doubt and he began to sink.

Name some moments in your life when your “want to” exceeded your “can do”?

When God asks you to do the impossible (like walk on water) how do you typically respond?

Do you ignore God?

Do you clean out your ears so that you can hear God more clearly?

Do you give it a try without believing that it is possible?

Or do you step out believing that if God asks you to do something then God will see you through it?

How does God help us with those impossible requests like loving our enemies and turning the other cheek?

How do our doubts lead us away from faithfulness?

How can our trust in the God within us lead us to greater faithfulness?

- Accountability
 - I have been faithful this week by ...

- I have struggled this week with...

- Intercessory Prayer
 - Concerns for others

- Concerns for our church

- Concerns for our community

- Concerns for ourselves

- Sharing our hopes and dreams for the week ahead

- Close with the Companions Circle of prayer by offering a prayer of thanks from each person for each person before sharing together the words, “We depart in peace. Amen”

Group Journal
Week of 9/28/08



RE-Connecting

- ❑ Informal Sharing
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- ❑ Simple Prayer re-connecting ourselves with God.

Exploring God Within Us

15“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

John 14:15-17

Paul recognized that more often than not we do the very things we hate. (Romans 7:15) The evil acts come far too easily. However, there are moments when we actually do that which we should. Such moments are the result of the holy presence within our lives.

In John’s gospel, as Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure, he tells them, “Do not worry, neither let your hearts be afraid.” His Father will send the gift of the paracletos, the counselor, the advocate who will be God’s presence in their lives.

He will be the Spirit of truth that will show us what God expects of us and will give us the courage to do it. The world will not be able to see Him and will not understand your actions. But you will know because he abides in you and you in him.

The journey of faith is never an easy path. It cost Jesus everything. A German Pastor wrote about the “cost of being a disciple” as he spent his last days in a Nazi prison camp.

In what ways does your faith cost you?

Have you ever had to face a cost for faith that you did not believe you could afford?

How did you respond to that cost?

Our fears can thwart our deepest desires. They can lead us to do the very opposite of what we want to do. How does the “Spirit of truth” help us to deal with our fears and pay the full cost of discipleship?

How does the Spirit of truth help us deal with the scorn of the world when we live out our costly faith?

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- I have struggled this week with...

- Intercessory Prayer
 - Concerns for others
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- Concerns for our church

- Concerns for our community

- Concerns for ourselves

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- Sharing our hopes and dreams for the week ahead

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