

*... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

I want to begin our time today with a word of thanks to the faithful people of Saint James Church, for the many expressions of kindness, gratitude and love through October's Pastor Appreciation month. There wasn't a day that a note or card didn't arrive. And, I was gifted with time away for rest, rejuvenation & renewal. I am blessed to serve with able leaders so that sharing the pulpit with any of our Lay Servants is a joy, and not a burden. Truly, it is a blessing to serve this congregation.

We are focusing on a season of Beauty, in which we are cultivating Contemplation and Compassion.

The contemplative way of life is not simply adding on meditation or prayer practices to our beliefs about God. It is a journey which unravels our beliefs about God so we might go into deeper relationship with the Divine Beloved.

We've looked at growing deep roots, soaking in the warmth of God's love, and focusing on resiliency in difficult times, beauty in the midst of brokenness.

Today, we are called to praise the name of God, for God is good and is responsive to the needs of God's people. There is no one name of God, for no words can adequately express all that God is. God is deep, like a Divine Abyss, dark in the sense of a mystery of unknowing all that God is, like the Universe, and twinkling in the glorious expansiveness of the beauty of a pinpoint of light in the heavens above.

The psalm-writer is very clear about knowing God through our senses, in our experience of God. In fact, just last week I participated in a retreat experience where we were invited to reflect on the ways we encountered God in our day.

Someone shared about three deer that were present in the park, like the Trinity. Another reflected on the many colors present in the leaves and a breeze that came by while praying, and I spoke about finding the little nut.

Many have heard my own story of being 'trustified', when I surrendered my whole self to God, for provision, protection and guidance, in discerning a path of life on a starry night. In that moment, I knew God as creator and author of all things; I knew Jesus as my friend, confidante, and companion; I knew Holy Spirit as guide and strengthening presence to see me through each step, day by day. I was justified by faith in that deep, dark and twinkling moment of communion with God... in God's presence.

The psalmist jars us to attention in the section about idols... the things in which we place value and hold as sacred above even God. These idols have no compassion, have no depth, have no justice within them. Rather, they are borne out of misplaced desire, greed, selfishness, and power over others. These idols are not responsive to needs, but are used to oppress and gain self-benefit.

Even our experiences can be idolatrous. Can you think of a conflict originating in two people with radically different experiences of the same thing or event? Anytime we take some thing or idea and make it solid and immovable, we create an idol.

Humans are so adept at this we can make something as malleable and fleeting as a feeling or experience and turn it into something to hold onto. A good example of this is the passage from Exodus and the making of the Golden Calf. Aaron, Moses' brother & Lead Priest, is talked into providing a manufactured statue for the people to worship while Moses was up on the mountain communing with God. The golden Calf became as a substitute. Yet, no trophy crafted by human hands can be the deep, dark and twinkling presence of God.

The contemplative life invites us into a different kind of engagement with God and creation. In the words of Dr. Farley, "God is not something to be seen or heard or grasped by reason. We manufacture images of God all the time. We become very attached to our images. Thankfully, Divine Reality created us in such a way that we can move outside seeing, hearing, reasoning, feeling."

This past week I was immersed in God's creation as I took time away for renewal, rejuvenation and rest. In those days away I experienced God's transforming presence as I gave witness to the falling of leaves all about. I

walked through mist rising and moving. And I understood, yet again, that I am not alone... but surrounded, not only by God's presence, but by a great cloud of witnesses.

On the first Sunday of November each year, we call to mind the deep, dark and twinkling light of persons who have blessed us, shaped us, and live on within us. In the next few moments, let us pause and remember...

By remembering the Divine Goodness who is love and loves us, by remembering the twinkling lights that have shaped our lives, we remember who we ourselves are created to be: lovers of the Beloved, full of compassion and justice, and in love with the Holy One's cherished creation. This is the heart of the contemplative way, deep, dark and twinkling.

May it be so. So be it. Amen.