

Solitude
Covenant Group Session
Follen Church Lexington, MA
January 2018

CANDLE LIGHTING & OPENING WORDS:

All man's miseries derive from not being able to sit quiet in a room alone.

Blaise Pascal

Language... has created the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word 'solitude' to express the glory of being alone.

Paul Tillich

SILENCE

CHECK IN:

1. Tell us your experience with the spiritual exercise for this month.
2. What is lifting or draining your spirit this month?
3. Do you often feel lonely when you are by yourself or do you know the 'glory of being alone'?

Spiritual Exercise for January: **Solitude**

January is often a time for resolutions, so here is a tough spiritual exercise!

Spend one day **WITHOUT YOUR CELL PHONE**.

Don't look at it. Don't turn it on. Don't make a call. Don't receive a call. Don't text. Don't check Facebook. Drive places using a paper map. Disconnect, detach, cut the tether...just for a day. What happened? What did you notice? Did you find ways to get around the exercise—and why? Did you have any conversations or experiences you might not ordinarily have had? And finally—would you try this again?

SILENCE

MAIN READING:

I have had the experience of living in a false world. One day I was deeply depressed by the severe criticism a colleague had received—a person who was living his life in an honest and truthful sense, attempting to express his unique interests in his work. I felt especially saddened when I realized how he had suffered, when all he wanted to do was maintain ... a genuine existence and relatedness. I felt especially sensitive to pretense and surface behavior, as though nothing were real. A numbness settled in, right at the center of my thought and feeling. That night

even the children were unable to shake my grief and sadness. In their own spontaneous, unknowing ways, they tugged and pulled at me to draw me into life, but for me there remained only suffering in the world.

After the children had gone to bed, I decided to go for a walk. The night was dark, filled with black clouds. Large white flakes of snow fell on and around me. The night was silent and serene. Suddenly, without understanding in any way, I experienced a transcendental beauty in the white darkness. It was difficult to walk on the glazed surface but as I walked I felt drawn to the black inky streaks embedded in the ice. Dark, wavy lines, partly covered by snow, spread out in grotesque forms. I knelt down, touching the black irregular patterns. Immediately I felt a chill but at the same time the ice began melting as my fingers touched it.

My inward heaviness lifted, and I was restored to a new capacity for exertion and endurance. I realized how, out of broken roots and fibers, in a genuine encounter with nature, it is possible to discover a new level of individual identity and to develop new strength and conviction. ...how in communion with nature the self can reach a new dimension of optimism and a new recognition of the creative way of life.”

Clark Moustakas, *Creativity and Conformity*, 41-2.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Here nature is the resource that creates the sense of release. What else might bring a shift in feeling for you?
2. Do you have a regular practice of solitude or meditation? Share what your practice is.
3. Is a belief in divine power needed to have the kind of breakthrough and relief seen in the reading?
4. How did the Spiritual Practice relate to the main reading?

AFFIRMATIONS

This is a time for the whole group to consider quietly what was experienced or spoken, to describe what might have shifted for you or someone else, or to express gratitude or appreciation for something that you or another person revealed or expressed. The purpose of this section is to reflect silently on what was moving or meaningful, and then to offer a single comment into the circle without further response or conversation

CHECKOUT - Like/Wish/Wonder:

This is a time to consider the experience we have had together, and share gratitude, appreciation, concerns, or ideas. Try to start your sharing with “I like…” “I wish…” or “I wonder…”

CLOSING WORDS: Let us say/ sing together these words from our fellow Unitarians in Transylvania:

Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let the stillness carry me.
Find a silence, hold a silence, let the silence carry me.
In the spirit, by the spirit, with the spirit giving power,
I will find true harmony.

Until we meet again, let us go forth, sharing the gifts of Sacred Listening.
The light within me honors the light within you. Go in peace

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE for February: **Secrets**

Contemplate, and discuss with loved ones and your covenant group this question: What is the difference between privacy, secrecy, and confidentiality? And, if you believe in God (or something like God— Spirit of Life, Love, the Universe, Ground of Being...), do you have any secrets from God?

