

Experiencing the Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-9 and 1 Peter 1:15-19
Rev. Brenda Satrum, February 19, 2023

RESOURCES ON PRAYER

From 24-7 Prayer: [How to Practice Christian Meditation](#)

From Henri Nouwen: [The Prayer of the Beloved](#)

This is a longer practice, three parts in 10 minutes each. I usually shorten to 3-4 minutes each to pray for 10-12 minutes total. We can start small and grow with practice!

How To Pray: A simple guide for normal people, by Pete Greig. NavPress, 2019.

John Michael Talbot [Prayer for Guidance](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

JMT "Prayer for Guidance." As we come to worship the God who's always loving us first, take a deep breath. Bring your shoulders up to your ears, then let them melt down you back. Today we're going to enter the Gospel with our imaginations. As a warmup, I wonder if you can remember a moment of warmth and safety that you enjoyed, maybe near a cozy fire, or in bright and beautiful sun, or in the embrace of a loved one... Thank you, Holy God, for the warm light of your love, your peace. May the peace of God be with you all! *Sharing the Peace / Welcome Home*

MESSAGE

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

When Doug and I brought contemplative reading of Scripture to a staff meeting almost 20 years ago, our organist wondered if it was New Age. I understood her concern: most Protestants left contemplative prayer and meditation to monks and Buddhists for centuries. Never mind our Hebrew ancestors were blessed to meditate on scripture day and night. Never mind Martin Luther's practice of *meditatio*: both quiet dwelling in and thoughtful wrestling with God's word.

These days at faith Emotionally Healthy Spirituality and the Prayer Course offer solid, clear teaching: in this busy, noisy, drama-filled culture of ours, there's no more healthy,

powerful thing we can do than sit quietly with God in the Spirit of Jesus. 24-7 Prayer founder Pete Greig writes, “Let me say this as clearly as I possibly can: (continue on p. 142)...”

See, Jesus’ disciples came to know Jesus by contemplation, too: just being with him, watching him, thinking about him, talking to him. So today we’ll walk with Jesus, Peter, James and John in our imaginations and see how God meets us there. In a few moments, I’ll set the scene, and we’ll read through Jesus’ Transfiguration in a method of imaginative prayer taught in the 1500’s by Luther’s Spanish contemporary, Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits.

I *will* say, like everything, our praying—whether spoken or silent, private or public—improves with practice! So be easy on yourself. When your mind wanders, just bring it back. If doodling helps, doodle! Try not to judge your experience as good or bad: God is simply delighted that we come near to worship and pray. Spirit’s gifts to you in this are truth and love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and self-control: anything else is not from God.

Now let’s set the scene. Jesus has been traveling around Judea blessing the poor and poor in spirit, healing the ill and injured, speaking and eating with—even touching lepers, women, tax collectors. He’s run afoul of religious leaders by claiming God’s own authority to accuse them of hypocritical double standards and rigid legalism. After feeding thousands and calming a storm, Jesus asks his disciples what they think. “You’re the anointed one, our messiah,” says Peter.

Then Jesus horrifies his follower-friends. He says their own religious leaders will have him arrested and killed. He also said he’d rise from the dead, but that was so crazy they couldn’t hear it. When Peter cries NO, Jesus rejects him, calls him Satan, and tells the disciples they also have crosses to carry and lives to lose. Jesus and his friends are headed for heartbreak!

How is your situation, our situation similar? Are you disappointed and distrustful of leaders in government or church? Are you saddened or made skeptical by war, poverty, conflict...? Is there something beautiful or heartbreaking going on in your family? Do you wonder—as I do—what is your cross to bear and what only God can carry? If your heart is at all heavy or your future uncertain, you’re ready to walk with Jesus and his friends.

Settle yourself comfortably. Close your eyes if you like. Take three breaths... Here we go:

Jesus finds you with the disciples in the morning. “You: Peter, James, John, come with me. We’re heading up there. I need some time alone.” Imagine the mountain above: it could be dry and dusty, green with cedar and fir—let your imagination set the scene. Holy Spirit, guide us!

Jesus leads up the trail. What’s he wearing? Is he striding out or taking it slow? How’s the pace for you? Look down at the trail—is it rocky? Dusty? Damp? Hear the footsteps of your friends.

Now raise your head. Look around and draw a deep breath. What do you smell? Take another full breath and feel the breeze on your face. Notice the temperature, the sky, the sun...

At first you and your companions are quiet, then someone wonders, “Jesus usually goes alone. I wonder why he wants us today?” What emotions do you feel? Do you speak to your friends? To Jesus? What do you say? What do they say?

Whew! It’s a stiff climb. You’re warm, and pause to shed a layer, then look up at the last, steep pitch. With another deep breath, you get back to it, step by step, muscles burning. Jesus tops out and disappears; you follow to a broad open place scattered with boulders and bushes. People have been here before. You toss your clothes over a rock and sit down. Jesus walks past the campfire ring, puts his hands on his hips and takes in the view. The sunshine feels good. You close your eyes.

Something stirs you to look up Jesus, and you’re stunned. His face and clothes are unbearably bright. You squint against the light.

Suddenly, two other figures stand with Jesus. In a moment you recognize Moses, Elijah. They talk with Jesus, but you can’t hear them. What are their expressions? How are they moving?

Peter strides toward Jesus, “Teacher, it’s GOOD to be here. If it’s ok with you, I’ll put up three shelters here for you, Moses, and Elijah.” Suddenly a bright cloud swallows Jesus, Peter, all of you in damp, misty fog. A strong voice sounds out—filling your body, your mind: “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!”

Your legs won't hold you. You're on your knees in the dirt, terrified, who knows for how long? Then a hand touches you, raises you to your feet: Jesus says, "Get up. Don't be afraid." Looking up, you see Jesus, alone. How does Jesus look to you now? You dust yourself off.

No one says a word. You gather your things and put them back on, chilled. The sun's back again, but the cloud's dampness lingers. As the four of you hike back down in silence, what are you thinking? What do you feel?

As the trail nears town, Jesus stops and gathers you, looks you each in the eye: "Don't tell anyone about this until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." You look at the others and see questions in their eyes. Jesus turns and walks on, and you follow.

Silence, slowly open your eyes and come back to the sanctuary or wherever you are... Friends, we will each have had our own unique walk with Jesus courtesy of our God-given imaginations, Scripture, and the Spirit. Again, please set aside any judgements about how well or not well "you did," simply notice what you noticed on your journey, and give thanks.

- How was that hill? Tell a neighbor if you breathed hard or not.
- What's something you noticed when Jesus was with Moses and Elijah.
- How about when the cloud came? What bodily sensations did you notice?
- What did you notice about the voice? The words?
- Where did Jesus touch you? How did, "Get up. Don't be afraid," make you feel?
- What else did you notice?
- Did anything surprise you?

Years later, as an old man, Peter wrote, "we didn't make up fables when we told you how Jesus came with power... Our own eyes saw him shine, our own ears heard the Voice of God's Glorious Cloud, and we have the prophetic word from his Spirit. Tend these things like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. (2 Pet 1:16-19)

What have you seen today or on other days, friends? There are 550 references to remembering in the Bible: remember how God has come to you, tend such memories like a lamp shining in a dark place. Keep the wick trimmed and the flame steady. Tell the

story. Journal it. And keep coming back to the Word of Life until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Amen.