

THE STILL POINT

December 3, 2023

Rev. Jimmie Scott

Good morning. [Congregation: "Good morning."]

So this morning I'm going to be exploring a topic that's relatively new to me -- but not so new -- called "the still point." And before I do that, I want to share a few thoughts that encouraged me to delve into this thought process.

I'll begin with this. It says:

"At the still point of the turning world, neither flesh nor fleshness ... neither from nor towards ... at the still point. There the dance is on. But neither arrest nor movement ... and do not call it fixity ... Where past and future are gathered ... For it is neither movement from nor towards. Neither ascent nor decline. At this point of awareness, when we become that still point, we find we can get nearer to truly moving into ourselves. It's a state of being where time itself can pause or stop just long enough ... where we become present to actually feeling the body and the breath as one."

I stumbled on this idea a few weeks ago, and I thought I was on to something new. And Sally Jo reminded me this morning that she's been practicing this therapy for some time. So I never thought of myself as practicing the therapy, but the idea and the concept I found to be fairly new to me in that name space.

But I don't want to get into that in this moment. I want to start off with something that is equally important. So long before there were churches on every street corner, there were what was called "circuit riders" -- preachers who rode horses to different locations to deliver the messages of hope and faith to people right where they were.

And one of my favorite stories about the practice revolves around a circuit rider in Tennessee, which is one of my states where I officially began my journey in ministry. So this one circuit rider was out riding one afternoon, and he comes upon a farmer who's hard at work in his fields. And hoping to invite the farmer to his church, the preacher calls out, "It's a fine day, isn't it?"

And the man responded, "Maybe fine for you; all you've got to do is ride around and think about God all day while I sweat in this field, working hard."

And so the preacher says, "You're right; I'm sure you do work hard. And I admire that. But what you need to realize is: I do a different kind of work."

And the farmer says, "Yeah, sure." [Congregants laugh]

And then the preacher says, "You're right. You know, you do work hard in these fields."

And the man says, "Again, all you do is ride around thinking about God all day. And when I think about it, that's really not work. And it's definitely not hard."

So the preacher responds, "It's harder than you think. I'll tell you what. If you can think about God for one minute -- and don't think about anything else -- I'll give you my horse, and that will make your work a lot easier."

And the farmer says, "You can't be serious!"

And the preacher says, "Yes; I'm serious."

And the farmer says, "You've got a deal."

The preacher says, "Start."

Ten seconds go by. Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds. The farmer looks up and says, "Does the saddle come with the horse?" [Congregants laugh]

Okay. So all he had to do was think about God for 60 seconds ... but he couldn't do it. Or perhaps he just wouldn't do it.

And it's often been said that nature abhors a vacuum. And it is pretty hard to not control our thought processes. As a matter of fact, I'm going to suggest that the reason we have a lot of unhappiness and a lot of unease and a lot of unrest -- a lot of struggle -- in our lives is because we can't take the time, or are unwilling to take the time, to be quiet and to be still and to be rejuvenated and to be reenergized through the power of the Christ that is in us. I'm going to make that assertion this morning.

Also, I'll assert that we struggle with silence. We get uncomfortable with it. Yet, comfort is something that we often crave in our life and in our experience. And I would go so far as to argue that we're rejuvenated when we're able to be silent for extended periods of time. And there's much Scriptural evidence to support that.

So when I was about six or seven years of age, my mother struck me. I ran out of the house. And in the community I lived in, there was a gentleman farmer, I'll call him, who had a little plot of land right in the heart of the town I grew up in. And it was sort of like a farm. He had pigs and he had a horse. He had a couple of mules. And just to the left of his house, there was an area of bramble bush that was probably a quarter of an acre.

And so I ran to that spot and went into that area of bramble bush. And I sat there in the quiet of that area for probably five, six, seven hours -- I don't know how many hours it was -- until early afternoon, when I heard people calling my name. And they called and they called, and I finally made a decision to come out of that bramble bush. My mother was called, and she took me home to sit down. And we had a discussion. And she never struck me again. And I don't know that I've ever been stricken since that point.

One of my favorite spiritual teachers, Teilhard de Chardin, said of the practice of silence in prayer, "*Do not forget that the value and interest of life is not so much to do with conscious things as it has to do with ordinary things ... while remembering the perception of their enormous value in our lives.*" Silence is ordinary. But it's also extraordinary.

And when I began to really research this idea of still point -- which is defined therapeutically as a technique that shuts down one's stress cycle in the brain and in the mind, and essentially enables both of them to rebalance themselves -- I began to understand how important the practice of prayer and silence and meditation and the ability to be alone within one's self is.

I've read that in much of the readings that I've done, particularly in Zen Buddhism, where the still point can be experienced as a single pointedness of mind. But I don't know that I ever accepted it for the value that it imposes on our lives. And I'm now beginning to understand -- as I look at all these therapeutic models coming together -- how just the simple act of prayer, itself, is so powerful for us.

And I'm not sure we spend enough time teaching about it and talking about it, because we assume that our practice is okay as it is. But everything can be finetuned in life. And I think if we finetune our prayer processes, we're doing one of the greatest services we can do to ourselves.

I want to share a few pieces of Scripture from the Master Teacher about this wonderful idea of prayer and stillness. And the first thing I want to share comes from the Gospel of Matthew. It's located in the 20th chapter. And Jesus encounters two blind men, and they are crying out, "*Master! Have mercy on*

us!" And the Scripture states, and I quote, "*Jesus simply stood still and had compassion on them. And he touched their eyes and they received sight.*"

The next one: the Gospel of Mark, 4th Chapter, 39th Verse. They're in the boat and a storm arises. The disciples are frightened that the boat will be capsized. They awaken him from his sleep. According to the Scripture, "*He arose, rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace; be still.' The wind ceased and there was a great calm.*"

The Gospel of Mark, the 10th Chapter, the 49th Verse. The setting is the City of Jericho. They encountered a blind man sitting by the highway begging. "*Son of David, have mercy on me.*" The Scripture states, "*And Jesus stood still ... said to the man: 'Go thy way; thy faith has made you whole.'*"

Be still! Go thy way; thy faith has made you whole.

Luke 7:14. The City of Nain, a woman exiting her home behind a procession of men carrying a casket containing her only son ... her only reason for living, her only reason for existing, her only reason to actually stay alive. And the Scripture states, "*He touched the casket and the pallbearers*" -- as we call them today -- "*stood still. And he that was dead got up and began to speak.*"

The Gospel of John 11:20 -- the rolling away of the stone at the tomb of Lazarus. "*From quietness and stillness, then with a power and conviction, he spoke, 'Lazarus, come forth!'*" The rest is history. Lazarus comes forth.

Psalms 46:10: "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Stop struggling. Stop striving. Stop fighting. Be still and know that I am God! Stop questioning. Stop begging. Be still and know that I am God!

And this particular psalm was written by the sons of Korah, and these two guys were warriors of sorts. But they were actually musicians who had no interest in being at war with anyone or anything. They simply wanted to be able to use the creative energies that they had to bring about peace, and to support healing, and to provide a platform for the people of that particular era -- to be able to go into a welcoming place and have nothing but love and harmony and peace and quietness.

So if you've been listening to me, you've heard me quote Jesus from each of these four Gospels. And in each instance -- each circumstance -- no matter what the condition was, he referenced stillness. In the Greek language of the New Testament -- I should say Greek Aramaic language -- the word for stillness is "histayme." It means literally to stand: to stand by or to stand forth; to stand still.

And I want to suggest to you that either one of these definitions may sound easy. And they may sound simple. But to actually experience them is an entirely different matter. Because our lives are filled with "stuff." And it's up to us how we manage the stuff in our lives: accidents; anger; inharmony; disparity; whatever your "thing" is that's getting you into a stage of upset. It's up to you to manage that distraction. How we define it for ourselves ... that's a whole different matter. But it's still up to us.

One of my favorite Miles Davis quotes is when he said to another musician, "*Sometimes you have to play a long time to be able to play like yourself.*" And Miles was an incredibly bright, deep person. Sometimes you have to play for a long time to play like yourself.

See, everybody can play according to harmonies and all the different aspects of music, but to play like yourself is a whole different ballgame. Same process is true of living; it takes a long time to live like yourself. Not like the self that everybody suggests that you should be ... but to live like yourself takes a long time. And it doesn't happen instantaneously.

I'll never forget what Beethoven said about his 9th Symphony. He said that symphony came to him in a flash one night in his sleep. The entire 9th Symphony came to him in a flash one night in his sleep! He

said he got out of bed immediately and he began composing it. The composition took weeks; the symphony came in seconds, but the composition took weeks. The Spirit of God is in us all the time; It's flashing for us! But it takes time and effort and discipline to make it work and become a part of who we are.

The still point. For me, it's about creativity. It's about acceptance. It's about awareness. It's about motivation. It's about our willingness to be guided and directed by something greater than ourselves. It's about inspiration. And finally, it's about something we don't like to hear much about, and that's discipline. Self-discipline.

Speaking of discipline, I'm going to leave you with one of my favorite anecdotes about discipline. There were these two mischievous boys. They were the ages of eight and 10. And they were well known in their community for causing all sorts of trouble in their little town. And so their mother, hoping to teach them some discipline, asked a preacher to speak with them. And the preacher agrees, but he asks to see them individually. He said he didn't want to talk to both of them together; he needed to talk to them individually so he could kind of figure out what the root of the problem was.

And the preacher was a huge man. He had a big, booming voice. And so he takes the younger boy first, and he sits the younger boy down. And he sternly asks him if he knew where God was. And the boy's mouth drops open. And so the preacher repeats the question in an even sterner voice: "*Where is God?*" And the boy lowers his gaze, but he does not answer. And the preacher pauses and then he raises his voice again, and he shakes his hand in the boy's face, and he bellows, "*Where's God?*"

And the boy screams and he gets up and runs home and he dives into his closet and he shuts the door behind him. When his older brother found him in the closet, he asked him, "*What happened? Why are you shaking?*"

And gasping for breath, the younger boy said, "*We're in big trouble this time.*" He said, "*God is missing and they think we did it.*" [Congregation laughs]

I'm missing. God bless!!!

Copyright 2023 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Jimmie Scott