

Solitude

Traditional Worship • July 8

- Prayer Concerns: Corey Jackson, Bev Lacy, Peggy Kincaid, Jane Drebus; the family of Carlus Grant in his passing; the family of Duane Corn in his passing.
- Today's Sanctuary flowers provided Pam & Lewis Flanigan to the glory of God in memory of the Johnson Family.
- Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Joan Nevill. Organist: Barbara Waite. Additional music provided by the Temple Brass.
- Ushers (8): Greg & Linda Stilwell, captains; Chuck Taylor, Jacque Hardin, Nelson & Joyse Rivers
- Ushers (15): Eric Eades, captain, Seby Durgy, Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Greeters (8): Marty Van Stone, Wanda Erwin, Carla Bolin, Janet Kissel
- Greeters (15): Warren & Rosemary Heinsohn, Janet Kissel, Mary Lockett

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

Temple Brass

WELCOME

PRELUDE

"Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose" arr. by A. Fedak

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: God has made us into one Body with many members.

People: United and uniting, this is our calling.

Leader: God calls out our diverse gifts through the One Spirit.

People: United and uniting, this is our redemption.

Leader: God longs for us to be knit together through love.

People: United and uniting, this is our worship.

CHORAL INTROIT

"Faith Unlocks The Door" by S. Scott & R. Sands

*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

*FIRST HYMN #163

"Ask Ye What Great Thing I Know"

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Please turn to those around you and pass the peace of Christ.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Temple Brass

CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Let us pray, each in our own hearts, whatever we need to unburden from ourselves and give to God.

LORD'S PRAYER

MISSION HERE REPORT

GIVING OFFERING

"Deck Thyself, My Soul, With Gladness" arr. by D. Cherwien

***DOXOLOGY** *the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.*

#95 in Hymnal

ANTHEM

"Ride the Chariot" by M. Lister

KDZ MOMENT

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 5:12-16

Jesus Cleanses a Leper

¹²Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean."¹³Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." Immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴And he ordered him to tell no one. "Go," he said, "and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them."¹⁵But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. ¹⁶But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE UMH #162

"Alleluia, Alleluia"

MESSAGE by Pastor JillAnn Knonenborg

"Solitude"

During the first half of this sermon series, we explored how God can speak to and through us, and now in this second half, we're learning a few ways to listen for God speaking. Henri Nouwen, who was a renowned Catholic priest and theologian, said that we can know it's God's voice speaking when the voice refutes the lies this world tells us. When the voice speaks Truth in the face of all the lies – lies about ourselves, about other people – that voice comes from God.

So here is one Truth that God longs for you to accept: you are not what other people think and say about you. You are so much more than that.

Let us pray...

It must've been hard being Jesus. Not just the dying on the cross part – we know that was hard - but constantly having people talking about you, trying to figure you out, and never getting the full picture. Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus is desperately trying to show people who he is through his words and actions, but it always goes over their heads. At best, they think he's a very nice wise man. At worst, they think he's a dangerous troublemaker. Not until the very end of the story does anyone realize that he is God-made-flesh. All eyes are on him, but no one truly sees him.

I notice Jesus struggling with the spotlight in today's Scripture. Jesus is approached by a man in need. He's been ostracized by his community because he has a skin disease. The man asks for help, Jesus has the ability to help, and so Jesus heals him. But Jesus doesn't want a show. He doesn't want the TV pundits and bloggers online to analyze his healing strategy, critique his choice of words, or comment on the clothes he was wearing. So he asks the man not to tell anyone who healed him.

Nonetheless, the author, Luke, says "more than ever, the word about Jesus spread." Jesus cannot escape his public persona. Whoever he really is, what control his life is who people think he is.

How often have you felt like you live under the same microscope? Like you live and die by other people's perceptions of you? Right before I finished college, the Career Services Office gave all the graduates a list of "do and don'ts." At the top of the list in red capital letters was, "Be careful what photos you put on social media. You never know what people might think."

Now, neighborhood gossip is as old as neighborhoods, but in today's hyper-connected world, it is harder than ever to distinguish ourselves – emotionally, mentally, and physically – from everybody's opinion of us. It gets to the point where if we have to disconnect for some reason, we feel lost because our identity is dictated by others. It is often those of us who are most plugged in, the most involved, the ones who love people the most who feel the most alone.

So when Jesus was weighed down by the opinions of others and ideas about who he should be, what did he do? Luke tells us, "He would withdraw to deserted places and pray." Solitude: Jesus' way to rediscover who he was, was solitude.

Now, introverts, before you check out on the rest of this sermon because you are already the masters of your personal bubble, let me be clear that solitude is not the same thing as alone time. In alone time, we might escape into a good book, zone out while watching Netflix, or dive into deep-cleaning the house. In alone time, we want to dissociate from ourselves and enter some other, less-exhausting reality.

Solitude is the exact opposite. Solitude means being totally present in this moment without distractions. Solitude is like silently staring into the mirror for half an hour without anyone else there to tell you what you're supposed to see.

I think that's why Jesus prayed in his solitude; not to fill the emptiness up by doing something, but to shut out anything that was not real – not Truth. Solitude shows you who you are when you don't have the affirmation or admiration of others to tell you who you're supposed to be.

Solitude forces me to listen to what my heart wants to teach me; to feel things deeply without numbing them, or turning away from them toward the familiar, arms-length connection of Facebook. Solitude creates room for God to speak through what I feel and experience without having to yell over the chitchat. Because what we often discover in solitude is that we're not alone at all. God is there, too.

I need to back-track a bit. As someone who has struggled for almost ten years with the disease we call clinical depression, solitude has sometimes been a very scary place for me. Suffice to say, some not-so-pleasant things have happened when I dove into all the hurt by myself late at night. I tell you that because I know from experience that solitude for solitude's sake is not always a healthy, positive thing.

That's why it is so important that we don't enter the solitude thinking we're alone there. Sounds like a contradiction, right? But for Christians, the difference between solitude as self-destruction and solitude as spiritual healing is going there feeling like you have no one and going there with God. Forgive me the analogy, but intentional solitude can be like date night for our relationship with God. The parents in the congregation get what I'm saying. Sometimes you need to leave the kids with the grandparents, go to a quiet restaurant, and reconnect. Just because you've been living in the same house and talking about the same schedule doesn't mean you've been on the same page. You need to be alone with each other to do that.

Which explains why I'm terrified of solitude with God. It's exposing and genuine. Suddenly there's only one voice telling me who and what I am. Once I make the room for God to speak, what will God say? That I'm unimpressive? That I have less control than I want to believe I do? That I'm scared and lonely and hurting? That I've spent so long playing a part, there's no "me" left?

Many of us spend more energy than we realize avoiding God's voice. We lock God up in dogma and ideology, so that we can always find Him – well, a nonthreatening, watered-down version of Him – there. Then we never have to listen for the wild, beautiful, mysterious voice of the Holy Spirit in the here and now. We are afraid that when the Living God tells us who we are, He will just repeat everything the world told us about ourselves. It was easy for Jesus to enter solitude! God was just going to tell him that he was awesome. Better to keep God at arms-length, just like everybody else.

And yet solitude in the presence of the Holy Spirit taught me something about myself, and about every human being, that I could not have discovered by looking out there. Late at night, when the house was quiet, I would sit on the end of my bed and pray through the Scriptures. I discovered these words from Isaiah, spoken over me at my Baptism: "But now says the Lord, He who created you...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you...because you are precious in My sight."

I suppose plenty of people have read those verses and been unaffected by them – let logic push away what their hearts were telling them. But for me, when all the noise and pretension was stripped away, I found that the truest thing about me is not whether I'm pretty, smart, funny, successful, or even a so-called "good person." The truest thing about me is that God loves me, which is also the truest thing about you. God has claimed you as His child. The truest, most fundamental thing about you is that you are unconditionally loved by a God who would rather die on a cross than stop loving you. Nothing can or ever will change that. It doesn't matter what color you are, or gender, or age, or what language you speak, or how much money you make, or what you've done. Regardless of whether people think you're perfect or think you're dirt, the truest thing about you is that you are loved.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that I've got this solitude thing all figured out. Solitude and I still have a complicated relationship. But even as I'm wrestling with what solitude means and what it looks like, I know it can change your life. I hope this coming week that you'll create a space for solitude. Whether you choose to pray, read Scripture, play an instrument, whatever... I hope you will listen to what God is saying when no one is watching. Here's a hint: you are loved.

Amen.

*LAST HYMN UMH #696

"Thou Hidden Source of Calm Repose"

*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

"Contrasts" by E. L. Diemer