

**Oregon City United Methodist Church**  
**18955 S. South End Road**  
**Oregon City, OR 97045**

**Rev. Michael Benischek**  
**503-522-9807**  
**January 26, 2020**

**Series: HOLY LIVING: Inward Spiritual Disciplines**  
**Sermon: Meditation - Thy Word**

**Psalm 119:1-3, 97-106**

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
who walk according to the law of the Lord.

2

Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
and seek him with all their heart—

3

they do no wrong  
but follow his ways.

Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.

98

Your commands are always with me  
and make me wiser than my enemies.

99

I have more insight than all my teachers,  
for I meditate on your statutes.

100

I have more understanding than the elders,  
for I obey your precepts.

101

I have kept my feet from every evil path  
so that I might obey your word.

102

I have not departed from your laws,  
for you yourself have taught me.

103

How sweet are your words to my taste,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

104

I gain understanding from your precepts;  
therefore I hate every wrong path.

? Nun

105

Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.

106

I have taken an oath and confirmed it,  
that I will follow your righteous laws.

## Sermon

It was years ago now, but I remember a few of the lessons I received when I got my pilot's license. I used to fly a little Cessna around, and I had to learn about the four forces that affect a plane. Wings keep an airplane up in the air, but the four forces are what make this happen. They push a plane up, down, forward, or slow it down. Thrust is a force that moves an aircraft in the direction of the motion. By propeller, engine or rocket, its what makes it go forward. Opposite of that is Drag. Drag tends to slow an object. Drag is caused by friction and differences in air pressure. Lift is the force that holds an airplane in the air. Wings provide lift, differences between air pressure below and above a wing. And the opposite of lift is weight, caused by Gravity. I remember my flight instructor taking us up to 8,000 feet and says, we're gonna stall this thing. Nothing gets your attention like the fact that you're about to crash an airplane on purpose. You pull up on the stick, the plane goes up, and you go up too steep, you lose the air pressure differential on the wings, what gives you lift. And without lift, weight takes over. Gravity becomes your enemy. Pulled up on the wheel, the stalling sirens go, and you can literally feel yourself and the plane dropping out of the sky. On the way down, spiraling out of control, the instructor says "This is not the ideal way to fly a plane. In the century long battle of metal going 100 miles per hour verses soft earth going nowhere, the earth has yet to lose." I hated that feeling. But you had to learn how to get yourself out of that mess. And you fix the plane so there's airflow around the wings, and once again, you have lift. That's better than crashing. I loved how my instructor put it: There is no position you can put this plane in that I cannot get you out of. If you have enough altitude, you can fix anything. My favorite way of flying is when everything is in balance. Level flight. Thrust equals drag as you fly through the air, lift equals weight so you stay at the right altitude. Everything in balance.

This morning's sermon is about finding that balance. Some of us have lives that feel like you're spiralling out of control. Some of us don't have enough lift in our lives. Some of us find that drag is greater than gumption to get up and do something, achieve something.

For the next couple of months, we will be exploring a few classical Christian Spiritual Disciplines that have shaped the lives of the faithful over hundreds of years. We will examine inward spiritual disciplines. We will delve into outward spiritual disciplines, and we will contemplate on corporate spiritual disciplines, churchy things we do together. This Sermon series is called Holy Living. My sermons might talk about God, I might bring up the name of Jesus, We might ask for the Spirit, but if I never tell you how to personally connect to the Divine, then I am missing something as pastor. So in these weeks ahead, we will look at ancient Christian practices still used today to create Holy Living, becoming Disciples. And today's ancient practice: Meditation.

I hear some of you snoring already (listen). Just focus for me for a few minutes. I promise to give you time in a little bit to close your eyes. But what is meditation, and what isn't it. If you're like me, you might have this idea that meditation is a whole lot of doing nothing. Doing nothing on purpose. Or trying to empty out your brain and become ONE with the Universe - or totally escape the universe. Block everything out. I am one with the Force, and the Force is within me. I am one with the force...If that is meditation, then I have better things to do with my time. When I was going through the credentialing process to be a pastor, Me and the other Ordinand had a lot of interviews. And at one, they asked me about my ministry, And I was active in ministry. We were doing mission trips, summer camps, going here, going there, we were doing stuff! And the chair of my interview team asked, Could you from sunrise to sunset, for a full day, sit on a hill, under a tree and just watch the day pass by, enjoy the beauty of creation, just "be". Could you do that? I figured the correct answer was yes, but then I added, but who would want to do that? Who's got time for that? There's ministry to DO. Worships to plan, people to save, Wednesday night dinners to cook. Who has time to sit around and watch daffodils open up and clouds roll by, and the birds sing sweetly in the trees. Watch the waves come in on the beach, as the sun makes its arc on the horizon. And as I say this outloud, that sounds kinda nice...Maybe there is something to this meditation thing after all. As the Psalmist says, Be Still, and Know that I am God. Be Still.

Meditation isn't nothingness. Is isn't about getting rid of everything around you, but it's about connecting and

healing. MEDitation. Think about all of the words that start with MED. M E D. We find words about healing: Medical, medicinal, medicate, medication. Words about healing. We also find words that connect: Medium - A way of transmitting from one plane to the next. Medium is the size of shirt between small and large. Or Medium, the smack dab middle of something. The time period we call Medieval is called that between it is the connecting periods between ancient times and the Renaissance. We call them the middle ages because they connected two other times of civilization. Some of us like to Meddle - to get between a few things or people. Mediator, a go between. The Medulla oblongata, the portion between the brain and the spinal cord, the middle part. You get the idea. Healing and Connection. Christian meditation a structured attempt is made to become aware of and reflect upon the revelations of God - prayer Scripture, so on. It is a healing practice that connects us with God. Meditation isn't nothingness, but a filling, trying to be who you fully are in that moment.

We spend most of our time not in the present. The present is the only place we live, but we have our focus in other places. We spend so much of our time in the past. We use so much of our emotional and spiritual energy to remember past mistakes, to bring back past hurts. To recall times we hurt someone or when someone hurt us. We also spend so much of our time and energies in our future. The worries of tomorrow. The fears of what may be. And 90% of what keeps us up at night are never going to happen - (we just don't know what 10% IS going to happen, so we have to focus on all of it, right?). Do you remember the name that God gave to Moses at the burning bush, when Moses asked God for God's name? Remember what God said? I AM. I AM. He didn't say, I WAS. Or I WILL BE. God's not there in the past or the future, but now. I AM. Maybe I'm not connecting with God because I spend all my time in the past and future, and missing the now. How does that song go? Thy Word, is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. Our scripture today was all about meditating on the Word, and what it means for us today.

What do the experts call it nowadays? Mindfulness? I like that phrase. If meditation freaks you out, use the term mindfulness. According to the psychologists, Mindfulness is the process of purposely bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment. Just Be. Wherever you are, just be there, Know your strengths, know your weaknesses, and its OK. Be Still, and Know that I am God.

So how do you do this mediation thing? It's not like the movies, in a certain posture, chanting something. OOOHHHMMMMMMMMmmmmmmmmmm.....All it is is focus. According to one book on meditation: It is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word. It's that simple. I wish I could make it more complicated for those who like things difficult. There are no hidden mysteries, no secret mantras, no mental gymnastics into the cosmic consciousness. The truth of the matter is that the great God of the universe, the Creator of all things, desires our fellowship." Be Still, and Know that I am God. You can take a passage of scripture and ruminate on it, chew on it for a day or week. You can pause each morning before you go into work - and let the cares of home dissipate. You can pause each evening before you walk back into your house - and let the cares of the workplace dissipate. Be fully present. Turn off the world around you for a little bit. And just be. As you eat lunch, appreciate every bite - don't mindlessly fill your face, but savor each bite - thanking God for the gift of taste. Turn off everything in the house for a moment and just listen to the silence - and then notice how loud your house is with two TV's on, the hum of the lights, water dripping in the sink - we are always surrounded by noise. Take a moment and just be.

Be Still and Know that I am God. The great heros of the faith had their meditative moments, that gave them clarity of mind and Spirit. Give yourself time and space to think, to pray, to be. Monday was Martin Luther King Junior Day right? One of my favorite works of his was his essay: Letter from Birmingham Jail. It is THE TEXT for the Civil Rights Movement. He wrote it on a newspaper, as he sat in a Birmingham Jail, bits on a legal pad that he got from his lawyer. It was soon published in the New York Post (without his permission), The Christian Century, the Atlantic Monthly. The Time was supposed to publish it, but the board turned it down at the last moment. It has become a classic reading in high schools and colleges. Here's the thing: He never would have written it without being jailed. Well, duh, it's a letter from Jail. Says so in the name: You

miss the point. He was always fighting, always doing, always boycotting, always preaching and speaking. And traveling and doing this, and doing that. But he got locked up. And all he could do was think. And be. And once you are alone with yourself for a moment, or for hours, or for days, things become clearer. And focused. And he was able to write one of the best essays in American history - just because he was forced to slow down and just be. Be still and know that I am God. Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

I pray that you find time to just be this week. Find a time to collect your thoughts and meditate on who you are, today, in this moment. And connect with the one who made you. Think about it like this, going back to an earlier metaphor: There is no position that you put yourself in, that God cannot get you out of. It might not be what you like, or what you expect, but when you connect with God, whatever happens in this life is going to be OK. There's life after divorce. There's life after bankruptcy. Life goes on after the death of a loved one. You're going to be OK. Even if you're the one with the cancer, its going to be OK. There's life on this side, and that side. Be still and Know that I am God. Thy Word, is a lamp unto my feet and a guide unto my path.

We are going to practice this today, this art of meditation and I'll lead us through a little exercise. Like I said, there are countless ways to meditate, I'll just give you one way today. You are all welcome to participate, or not participate as you feel called. If you're a guest with us today, just know we don't do this every Sunday, or almost any Sunday, except today. But I just want to lead us in a few minutes of meditation, of mindfulness. We'll change the lights, add a little music. And just be.

#### Mediation Exercise:

(Pause as the music kicks in and the lights dim.) In the Pslams, we hear the words, Be Still and Know that I am God. So I invite you to be still, find a comfortable position. If it's comfortable for you, you can close your eyes. If you'd rather stand up and go in the back, that's fine, too. There are no rules in this, in that you allow the person next to you the freedom to be as they are, and not to bother them with your own ways of Being Still.

Take a moment and Relax your neck and your shoulders, most of us don't realize we have tension in them now. Relax your arms and your hands. Relax your legs and your feet. Just relax. Feel whatever tension you have just melt away.

Think about your breathing. When we are busy and we're anxious, our breathing becomes shallow and rushed. But deep breathing relaxes us and centers us. Scripture tells us that in the beginning when God made humanity, God breathed into them the breath of life. The Greek word for Spirit, is the same word for breath. So breathe in the Spirit of God. And breath out slowly and completely. Breath in deeply. And breath out slowly and completely. Breath in deeply. And breathe out slowly and completely. Keeping in mind that same pattern of slow and relaxed and deep breathing, take some time to consider that passage, Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a guide unto my path. (Long pause)

Oh God of Love, on this path, how are you invited me to grow love in myself? (Long pause)

God of love, on this path, how are you inviting me to grow love in my family, whatever my family looks like? (Long pause)

Oh God of Love, on this path, how are you inviting me to grow love in my community? (Long pause).

God of Love, on this path, how are you inviting me to follow the way of Jesus? (Long Pause)

If you are able, place your hands in front of you, palms up. Imagine all of the worry and the stresses and the problems of today are in these hands. Some of your hands feel light. Some of your hands feel heavy and burdensome. Now with your hands, take those problems, and move hands as if you are making a snowball out

of your problems and worries. Like a snowball, pack in your fears and stresses into the shape of a ball with your hands cupped around these negative feelings. Like a coldness of a snowball, we can feel these burdens send a chill into our Spirit. Now slowly, rub this imaginary snowball, these feelings of inadequacy or insignificance, as if you're smoothing out the snowball, but notice that the ball within your hands begins to diminish in size, as if the snow is slowly melting away. Keep rubbing. The burdens you carry, the guilt and shame we all have slowly dissipates. The ball is about half in size now. Be Still and Know that I am God. Keep rubbing it down. (PAUSE) And notice, that the ball is now gone. Melted away. You are You. There is nothing wrong with You. You are beloved. Open your hands, palm up. The fears and the problems no longer fill you, but as we continue to breathe, let us ask God for what it is that you need to be filled with. Maybe its patience. Maybe its kindness. Maybe its strength. Maybe its courage. Nature, both real and spiritual, abhors a vacuum. With worries and stress gone, you need to fill your Spirit with something else. In your heart of hearts, take a moment and breathe, and ask for what you need today.

Thank you O God for these moments of Stillness. Help us to find time to breathe deeply of your Spirit in the days and weeks ahead. Help us to make time to listen to your voice. We love you O God. And the family of God said, AMEN.

Quotes on Meditation:

"Meditation is a familiar friendship with Jesus" - Thomas a Kempis

"Hurry is not OF the Devil; it IS the Devil." - Carl Jung

Quiet the mind, and the soul will speak. Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati

Be here now. Be somewhere else later. Is that so complicated? David M. Bader

Praying is talking to the Universe. Meditation is listening to it. Paulo Coelho

All of man's difficulties are caused by his inability to sit, quietly, in a room by himself. Blaise Pascal