



AUGUST 2018: BEING STILL WITH GOD
CHN Series: Aid to Prayer and Reflection

The Revd. Rachel McDougall



Prayer is much more than what we say to God or what we do but is about being present with God.

This is something that we all find hard to do at times. Life is very busy and often gets cluttered by what is happening in our lives and to others. The house of our lives can become very full and so it is easy to close the door on the space for God or to push it aside. Just as decluttering our homes is very helpful, so also moving stuff aside to make space and find the space within where God is present helps us to breathe anew.

A time of quiet helps us to be open and make room for the God who is present. It isn't about running away from the other things that are going on in our lives but making room so that we see things from a larger perspective, to find the hidden blessings that are present if we but stop and look. To be with God is to pay attention and the first thing we need to do to pay attention is to be still, to come to a resting place .

So the first challenge is to become still, quieten down and make space. It sounds easy, but is often challenging. Being still is something essential to us as human beings, but we so often fight it. We might be able to stop talking and learn to sit still and relaxed, but what about the mind! As Teresa of Avila said, the mind is like a clacking mill that goes on grinding.



From Washington Crossing Park History Archives

Being still is about getting beyond the superficial thinking mind and going deeper to listen. It is about solitude and silence, for it is when we are still that we begin to understand our purpose allowing the layers of the surface worries to peel away so that we are in contact with the other who is within, the love that is present in our depths.



Front lawn of CHN Spirituality Centre by Jess Mazzini

It is the treasure hidden in the field that we find only by stopping. Often the most important thing to do even when really busy is to just stop and take stock, allowing the tension to slip away. It changes how we see things. Stillness helps us reconnect with ourselves and with God.

As Thomas Merton said, “Prayer does not blind us to the world, but it transforms our vision of the world, and makes us see it, all people, and the history of humankind in the light of God.” Indeed, being still and being present with God changes the way we think, the way we act and how we listen and react to others. To be still is a letting go and an acknowledgement that I am not in complete control of my world, that it is not all up to me, or all about me.

To be still is about paying attention to the God who is within and all around. It is not something that can be forced but it is accepted, opened up to. You can’t force yourself to be still – like telling a toddler to sit still – it’s almost impossible. But get

a two year old to pretend to be a sleeping bunny and it's amazing how quiet they can be! So stillness is about paying attention, attending to God, attending to what is around and within you, a letting go and a loosening up.

I find it takes me a while to become still. I need to quieten the body as a first step to letting go of the 'clacking' in my mind. It is something we set out consciously to do – to release the physical and mental tension we carry. Thomas Merton calls this 'recollection' the deep knowing we have, as Christians, that we are truly and wholly loved by God, we can experience this unconditional love and we love God and others in return.

Mother Maribel of Wantage says, "Silence is not a thing we make; it is something which we enter. It is always there. All we can make is noise, and that we do thoroughly these days!"

Magdalen Smith describes being still as admitting that we need God and that we need God badly, sometimes desperately, thirsting for being wrapped in silence.

When the disciples were in the boat and the sea became rough, they became terrified as they saw Jesus walking on the water. But Jesus says to them, "It is I, Do not be afraid." (John 6.21). When Jesus says this in the Greek he is saying 'I myself am'. I am here, I am present, I am, the great I am of God, the being who is



*Jesus walking on water
by Ivan Aivazovsky, 1890*

within us, who has been with us from the beginning of time and beyond. This is what we thirst for - the presence of God speaking within us and through us.

Praying is about being still, experiencing God. It is as simple as that! It is a time to recharge on the presence of God, so that we can continue to draw on that presence and re-enter it when we are caught up in the noise and busyness of our everyday lives. This is a stillness that can be carried through the day. I find that the times of stillness I keep in the morning and afternoon help me to be more present to each moment, to the small signs of God's presence that are actually all around.

Wendy Beckett in her book of meditations uses a picture by Edouard Manet, called *White Lilac*. She writes that he painted a number of pictures of fresh flowers and he found great consolation in considering their simplicity and stillness. She writes, "Silence has something of this function; a simplifying, a beautifying. It reminds us that we are only to be still and let the waters of grace refresh us and the sunlight of peace shine upon us."

You might like to sit with the picture of *White Lilac* and reflect on being still and be present with it, or something else you see around you or another picture within this booklet. Just pay attention to it, notice it and feel a slowing down.



White Lilac
by Edouard Manet, c.1882

Treasure the time that you have put aside to be still. Allow yourself to slow down and be, let there be a letting go.

SIMPLE RELAXATION EXERCISE

First of all, relax to help you enter the silence.

Sit with your back straight, feet on the ground. Shut your eyes.

Breathe in slowly and deeply.

It may help to still your mind by imagining that you are breathing in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

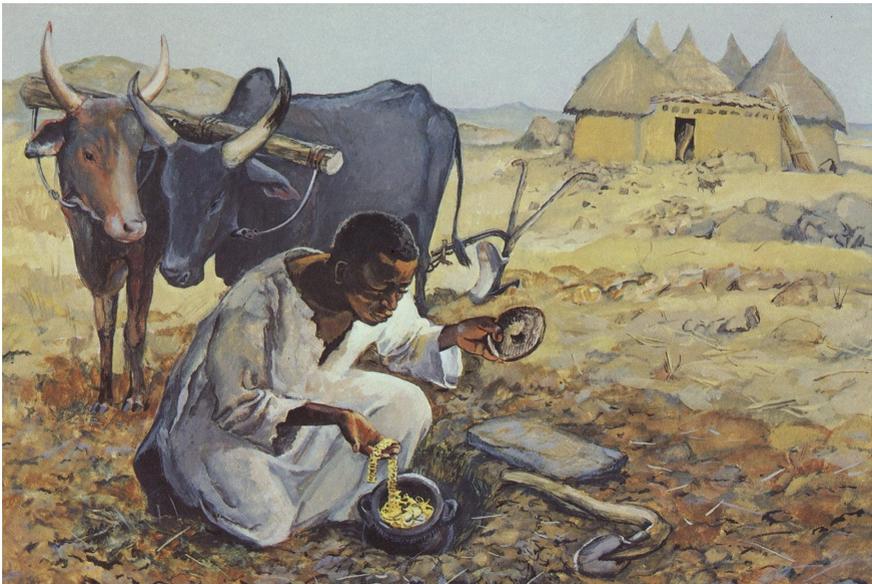
Exhale slowly, imagine that you are breathing out everything you are struggling with in your life at present, whatever they are.

Do this several times and pause after each exhalation.

You will find that at the end of ten breaths a sense of peace will have been built. Stay with this moment and try to enjoy being within it. If you find your mind wandering, just return.

Matthew 13:44-46

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.



The Hidden Treasure by JESUS MAFA

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.



Pearl of Great Price from kisspng.com

Sit with this passage and consider what word or phrase stands out to you?

Mull over it and repeat it in your mind.

What does this word or phrase say to you in your life at the moment? For instance:

What is the invitation?

What is God inviting you to do?

How is God inviting you to change?

The content of this booklet is from the Revd. Rachel McDougall, based on her work for the Prayer Day of August 2018. It is part of a series of 'Aids to Prayer and Reflection' which have been developed from our monthly Prayer Days, for your personal use. You may pick up other Aids from the Spirituality Centre or simply download copies from our website. We hope our readers find them helpful in their prayer lives.



You are welcome to join us for Days of Prayer and Reflection, which are held at the Spirituality Centre, on the first Thursday of the month, from March till November, 10am until 3pm.

The Eucharist is celebrated at midday and there are opportunities to sit quietly, use our library and wander in the gardens. BYO lunch; tea and coffee are provided. There is no charge but a donation is appreciated.

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