



## THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Ezekiel 31:3-7  
Rev. Sue Williams, Pastor

The contemplative life. I don't know about you, but when I hear the words "contemplative life," I immediately think meditation, yoga, chants, daily prayer, and I panic. My head says no, not me. Meditation is a signal for my brain to wander off, and I don't want to do headstands. Chanting requires singing ability, and sometimes even daily prayer seems out of reach. No, thank you very much, not me.

My spirit says, "Yes, I want a contemplative life." We should listen to our spirits on this one.

As terrific as meditation, yoga, prayer, and chanting are, they are only practices. Good practices, yes, practices that deepen our connection to the Divine, and I highly recommend all those things.

A contemplative life is more than those things; a contemplative life sees the world as God sees it and follows Jesus, who saw the world through the eyes of God, a God who never stops creating because the beauty of creation beguiles God.

Pseudo Dionysius, a sixth-century theologian, described God as beguiled by beauty. He spoke of a God who fell in love with creation and so was compelled to bring it into being.

We see that God at work in the story of creation in Genesis. God seems energized and in love with each step in the process. We know that, because each day creation grows and expands and because over and over again, God saw that it was good.

On the sixth day, God creates humankind – the piece of creation created in God's own image and gifted with a spark of the Divine. Humankind - designed to be in a relationship with God and a partner in the ongoing process of creation.

Beauty was the beginning point of all creation, and beauty is the beginning point of living a contemplative life – of seeing creation as God sees it.

Our eyes are marvelous things; they keep us from tripping over most things, and they help us find our way from here to there. It is our spirit that peels back the layers of what our eyes see so that we see the Divine Beauty in all of creation.

We confuse what our eyes see as pretty with the Divine beauty of creation. Did you know that if you Google the word pretty images pop up of beautiful women? Women who are pretty by our eyes standards, what our culture tells us, is pretty. Again, we need to listen to our spirits on seeing beauty.

Sounds tricky, doesn't it? And yet, we know those moments of real beauty – a sunset, a newborn child, a piece of music, or a painting – those moments when we see more than with our eyes - moments when we peel back our assumptions and our busyness and our spirits see Divine beauty.

Dr. Wendy Farley, the author of the book *Beguiled by Beauty*, writes "beauty reveals the relationship between the divine goodness and the world. . . Divine goodness fell in love with creation and so was compelled to bring it into being. . . Beauty, sadly overlooked in our modern times, is a link between the human spirit and the divine goodness."

When we see all of creation, even the pesky mosquito as amazing and beautiful, we walk into the realm of God.

Truthfully, I sometimes find it easier to see the created beauty in plants and animals, insects, and spiders than to see it in my fellow human beings.

Dr. Farley believes we have neither theological nor scientific theories that explain our separation from God, from one another, and ourselves. She says, "Moral ugliness scars the luminosity of our sacred goodness, but this goodness is created and cherished by the Beloved. . . What is beautiful and sacred in us cannot be destroyed, however much it can be marred."

When we open the door to seeing the beautiful and sacred in ourselves and other human beings, we walk into the realm of God, that realm promised to us by Jesus. If there ever was a time to open that door, it is now.

For it is the beauty of another human being that will move us to see the suffering. To see

the beauty in another is to have our hearts break over injustice.

Our world throws a lot of words at injustice and suffering, words like white privilege and racism. Those words may have truth in them, but they also divide and separate us. We don't need more separation.

What we do need is to take time and yes, the effort to see the Beauty of the Divine in each person; to hear through that Divine Beauty how they experience the world. When we see with our spirits and listen with our hearts, we will find radical compassion, which moves us to seek justice.

Emotions are running high in our world. We don't know what exactly to do, but we do know we need to do something for ourselves and our community. Jesus calls us to be those people.

Take a risk and join me to start doing "something" in a study and discussion of two excellent books: *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo and *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* by Latisha Morrison. We will begin on Monday, July 20, at 6:30 pm. We will meet both by Zoom and in person at the church. You have plenty of time to read the books and look forward to good conversations with others who truly desire to see the Divine Beauty in others and live the contemplative life in the footsteps of Jesus.

And don't make the contemplative life hard. Sometimes its ten seconds or less; that moment of Divine beauty in a sunrise as we grumble while taking out the trash, or when the children are tired and cranky, and we remember how beautiful they are for a brief second and then go back to dealing with their quarrels.

Look at that spider or fly or whatever bug is annoying you and see with your spirit the creation of a God beguiled by beauty. And while you're at it, see yourself through the eyes of the God who created you in beauty and loves you no matter what.

Ezekiel speaks of a Lebanon cedar, tall and beautiful; it's top among the clouds and its roots deep in the earth. An abundance of water nourishes it. Birds and animals and great nations thrived in its shade. The contemplative life gives us roots deep in the Divine, and we are fed by the springs of water that never run dry. From deep roots and living water, we become places where creation thrives.

Listen and see with your spirit and always trust the Spirit of God who created us in beauty, loves us no matter how we mar that beauty and is still creating beauty in us and all of creation.