

# Quiet Day 14 September 2024

## How the Four Gospels Shape our Own Knowing of Christ

9:30 - 9:40	<u>Introduction</u>
9:40 - 10:40	<u>First Conference</u>
9:40 - 10:00	First session of reflections on the theme of the day
10:00 - 10:20	First session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church grounds. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
10:20 - 10:40	First session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 10:18 to 10:20. At 10:20 we will intone the bell and begin silent prayer.]
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10:40 - 11:40	<u>Second Conference</u>
10:40 - 10:55	Second session of reflections on the theme of the day
10:55 - 11:18	Second session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
11:20 - 11:40	Second session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 11:18 to 11:20. At 11:20 we will intone the bell and begin praying.]
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11:40 - 12:00	<u>Third Conference</u>
11:40 - 11:55	Third session of reflections on the theme of the day
11:55 - 12:18	Third session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
12:20 - 12:40	Third session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 12:18 to 12:20. At 12:20 we will intone the bell and begin praying.]
12:40 - 1:00	<u>Eucharist. All are welcome.</u>

### That We May Know God . . .

Centering Prayer is a spiritual practice that opens the pathway of Contemplation – that gift of communion with God that is beyond thoughts, images, and words. Yet even in Centering Prayer, our conscious and unconscious images of God influence our ability to trust, to let go, to surrender to Presence. We are shaped by the four gospels of the New Testament in which each tells its own story about Jesus’ birth, his life and teachings, his crucifixion and resurrection. Looking at the similarities and differences in these stories will enable us to consider our own gospel story – how God has made Godself known to us – that we may live more deeply and fully into the Source of all being as we engage the practice of Centering Prayer.

## Four Gospels – Four Christs?

### *First Conference - the birth narratives*

- Mark:* no virgin birth . . . the story begins with Jesus' baptism
- Luke:* the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and give birth to a son and call him Jesus . . . and he will be called Holy, Son of God
- Matthew:* from Joseph's point of view . . . his fiancé Mary becomes pregnant and he plans to call off the wedding when an angel appears and tells him to marry Mary because the child she carries is conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- John:* the mystical story . . .no virgin birth . . . the account of Jesus' birth is celestial . . . in the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was God . . . and the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us.

### *Second Conference – the life and teachings of Jesus*

- Mark:* all action – fast-moving plot . . . very little teaching . . . Jesus acts like a superhero! God and Satan are at war; Jesus and the demons are the soldiers. Peter acknowledges Jesus as the “son of God” and Jesus says “that's right! Now I'm going to suffer and die.”
- Luke:* the only synoptic gospel to call Jesus “Savior.” Luke has more healings and forgiveness than any of the other gospels.
- Matthew:* instead of forgiveness, Matthew tells us how to get it right in the first place! Not just outwardly but inwardly as well. We obey the spirit of the law and that spirit is radically compassionate.
- Matthew, Mark and Luke have this in common:* “the world is in enemy hands” . . . but Jesus has come to announce that God is on the way. It is Jesus' life, death and resurrection that open the door to God's reign on earth.
- John:* mentions the Kingdom only once – and there it doesn't mean God's reign on earth – it's a spiritual vision. Jesus talks about belief, but hardly a shred of morality. Jesus is stoic until the death of Lazarus when Jesus weeps. Instead of instituting the Eucharist, in John's gospel Jesus washes the disciple's feet to show what “eucharist” means and what love looks like.

### *Third Conference – crucifixion and resurrection*

- Mark:* Jesus meets first to Mary Magdalene but the disciples don't believe her . . . so Jesus confronts them in person and reproaches them for their unbelief. The Mighty Messiah is back! But instead of exercising authority, he passes it on the disciples
- Luke:* Jesus appears first to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke's risen Lord is still the one we meet on the journey, the merciful Savior.
- Matthew:* Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene who tells the disciples – and they believe her and leave for Galilee per his command. Matthew's Jesus is about doing the right thing.
- John:* the risen Jesus first appears to Mary Magdalene, who recognizes his voice but not his appearance. He sends her to the disciples with a message – but not that he's going to meet them or that they should do anything. The message is mystical: tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

*Mark's King Jesus, the regal **Lion**, claims authority over the world but chooses sacrificial love instead of domination.*

*Luke's Jesus, as servant **Ox**, is the merciful Savior of sinners and the poor*

*Matthew's **Human** Jesus teaches us how to live wisely and compassionately*

*John's Jesus is the **Logos** for us to see and believe.*

*Jesus was not a simple character. Each of the gospel writers expressed different aspects of him, and were writing for different communities.*

*Just so, we are all different. What is our gospel story?*

*With thanks and appreciation to Bishop Dan Edwards (retired) for his notes shared so generously and graciously!!*

*Nothing could be more down to earth or more humbling than this Boundless Presence, which just is. It doesn't have to prove itself. It doesn't have to acquire anything. It just is . . . . .*

The essence of Centering Prayer is consenting to God's presence and action within. The seven stages of Centering Prayer outlined below dispose us towards ever-deepening self-surrender. These seven stages might be called the process of Centering Prayer. I summarize them as follows:

1. **Silence** is consenting to God's presence – what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God – within and among us. External silence supports this movement.
2. **Solitude** flows from interior silence. Disregarding our interior dialogue leads to “resting in God” (St Gregory the Great) and to consciousness without particular content.
3. **Solidarity** is the awareness of increasing oneness with God, with the whole human family, and with all of creation.
4. **Service** is following the ever-present inspirations of the Spirit not only during the time of formal prayer, but in the details of everyday life. It is a spontaneous expression of solidarity: God in us serving God in others.
5. **Stillness** is what Jesus called “prayer in secret” (Matt. 6:6). This is the experience of God's presence beyond rational concepts, beyond preoccupation with one's personal thoughts and desires.
6. **Simplicity** is the integration of contemplation and action, a growing capacity to live in the midst of duality – the ups and downs of daily life – without losing the non-dual perspective. Contemplation is not the same as action. They are distinct but they are not separate.
7. **Surrender** is the total gift of self to God, a movement from union to unity. It marks the beginning of what Jesus calls “eternal life” as an abiding state.

As we are moved through the stages of grace, our perspective changes in regard to Centering Prayer, the contemplative life, and God. In between the steps there may be delightful plateaus as well as dark nights, all of which have physical, mental, and spiritual consequences. The most transforming dark nights seem to be primarily psychological states, and the darkest of all is the purely spiritual suffering that arises from just being a creature, apparently unequipped for the hazards and trials of this life, but going through them with invincible confidence in God's love.

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