



April 7 – May 5, 2024
Discussion Questions

Week 1: Community

1. Was there anything in the message this week that resonated with you or that seemed timely? What did you find surprising or uncomfortable? Was there anything you disagreed with?
2. Describe a time when you have experienced God through connection to another person or people. What made this a “spiritual” experience for you and why?
3. Read Acts 4:44-47 and Acts 6:1-7. How does the description of community differ in these passages? In what ways is it the same? How does this relate to your own experience of both the beauty and messiness of community? In what ways do you see beauty and messiness at Cedar Ridge?
4. Read Luke 19:1-9. The name Zacchaeus means “innocent”. In what ways is Zacchaeus innocent in this story? In what ways is he guilty?
5. Who excludes Zacchaeus in this story and how do they do it? What action does Zacchaeus make as a result of his change of heart and enlightenment? How might our own actions exclude others (intentionally or unintentionally)? How might our own actions alienate ourselves from community?
6. What actions does Jesus take to include Zacchaeus? Do these actions come before or after Zacchaeus’ transformation. In what ways is Jesus challenging us about how kindness and inclusion can be transformative?
7. Break into groups of 2 or 3 and share about ways in which you are feeling lonely, excluded, or isolated at the moment. What changes might you be able to make yourself to remedy this? How would you like others to change their actions and behaviors towards you? How could you practice these same actions and behaviors towards others? After discussing, take some to pray for one another.

Practice for the week: Reimagining Family

Read Mark 3:31-35. Jesus seems to be creating a new paradigm for family where we are made one by the common pursuit of “doing God’s will”. In other words, seeking God and being intentional about our lives is our common family trait with Jesus. So this week let’s endeavor to “do God’s will” by reaching out to others. Return to your reflections on the discussion you had above and determine how you feel God might be challenging you to reach out. Then decide what action you need to take and intentionally work this into your schedule. Be realistic and aim for change that you know could be sustainable.

Week 2: Contemplation

1. What was your experience with the prayer practices on Sunday? Did you find any of them particularly helpful or meaningful?
2. How familiar are you with contemplative prayer practices? Are they something you practice regularly? Why or why not?
3. Read 1 Kings 19:11-13. Elijah was on the run from his enemies; he was in despair and had asked God to take his life (v. 4). Some versions translate "quiet whisper" as "silent sound" or "sheer silence." Why do you think God chose to speak to Elijah that way? What can we learn from that?
4. Take 10 minutes to practice silence in God's presence together. Set a timer so you do not have to think about it. Choose a "sacred word" that will symbolize your intent and consent to focus only on God during this time. It should be short and not distract you. Something simple like love, God, Jesus, peace will be fine. The word itself is not important—the intent to surrender is what's important.

Close your eyes and tell God that you are willing to release your whole being in order to be one with God and that you are offering your sacred word to signify your intent. Ask Jesus to help you. Begin by slowly and silently letting the word rest in your mind. This is not a mantra to be repeated, it is only to signify intent, and your word will slowly drift away along with your thoughts. Whenever you notice a thought, emotion or memory, silently and gently offer your prayer word to replace it. Let your thoughts float by—do not be distressed by their presence, just acknowledge them and let them go with the help of your sacred word. Even "spiritual" thoughts or prayers—let them all go and allow God to work in your mind and heart, unencumbered by your "self." At the end of your time, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a few minutes, allowing your thoughts to return.

Discuss your experience with the group.

5. Enter into an imaginative gospel reading together. Read John 20:24-29 four times, pausing for a few minutes after each reading.
 - The first time through, just listen to the story. Think about where and when it takes place, who is there, and what happens.
 - The second time through, look for more details: What are each of the characters doing and saying? How do they interact? What is the setting like? What is the atmosphere of this story?
 - The third time through, imagine yourself in the scene. What are you doing, thinking and feeling? What are the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations you notice? What emotions do you experience?
 - During the final reading, experience the events unfolding. When the reading ends, let the story continue to unfold within you, in your imagination, mind and heart. What will you say to Jesus?

Discuss your experience with the group.

6. How might you add contemplative prayer into your daily or weekly routine?

Practice for the week: Contemplative prayer practices

Set aside time this week to explore one or more of the contemplative practices posted to the Cedar Ridge website. Go to www.crc.org/resources-materials/ and select "Meditations" and then "Everyday Meditations." Alternatively, go to: tinyurl.com/yhnnpxp4 or scan the QR code below.



Week 3: Service

This week we gather for our churchwide Day of Service. There are no questions for reflection and discussion this week.

Week 4: Activism

1. Was there anything in the message on Sunday that stood out to you? What was most helpful for you? In what ways did it stretch your thinking?
2. Would you describe yourself as an activist? Why or why not? How has your understanding of activism evolved over time?
3. Reflect on a moment when you felt called to take action for a cause. What motivated you to get involved, and what impact did your actions have?
4. During the message, we looked at a Wikipedia definition of activism with the phrase “to partner with God” added to it. Read the definition below. Is there anything you would change or add to it?
Activism (or advocacy) consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct or intervene in social, political, economic or environmental reform with the desire [to partner with God] to make changes in society toward a perceived greater good.
5. Discuss the role of privilege in activism. How can those with privilege use it to support marginalized communities in their activism efforts?
6. Explore the concept of intersectionality in activism. How do various social identities (such as race, gender, sexuality, etc.) intersect to shape individuals’ experiences and inform their activism?
7. On Sunday, we briefly explored Moses as an example of activism. Can you think of any other Bible characters who are activists? What makes you call them activists? What can we learn from their actions?
8. Make a list of causes that resonate with you. Then, spend time alone or in a group praying for the individuals and communities involved and the people acting to make a difference.

Practice for the week: A prayer liturgy for a more just world

In the pursuit of justice and the betterment of our world, activism becomes both a calling and a responsibility. It’s a journey that demands courage, empathy, and resilience. This prayer practice is designed to ground activists in their purpose, nurture their spirits, and provide strength for the challenges ahead.

Opening Prayer:

Divine Source of Compassion,
Guide us as we embark on the path of activism.
Grant us wisdom to discern right from wrong,
Courage to speak truth to power,
And compassion to uplift the marginalized.

Reflection:

Take a moment to reflect on the injustices you seek to address through your activism. Consider the individuals or communities affected and the systemic issues at play. Allow yourself to feel empathy and determination to make a positive difference.

Prayer for Strength:

Creator of all,
As we face the trials of activism,
Grant us the strength to persevere.
May our spirits remain steadfast,
And our hearts filled with hope.

Silent Meditation:

Enter into a period of silent meditation, focusing on your breath and allowing any thoughts or emotions to arise and pass without judgment. Use this time to connect with your inner strength and find peace amidst the turmoil.

Prayer for Unity:

Eternal One,
In the face of division and discord,
Unite us in our common purpose.
Help us to see the humanity in one another,
And to work together towards a world of justice and equality.

Action:

Think of one concrete action you can take to advance your cause. It could be attending a protest, volunteering with a local organization, or initiating a conversation with someone about the issues that matter to you.

Closing Prayer:

Gracious Spirit,
As we conclude this time of prayer and reflection,
May we carry the light of justice wherever we go.
Guide our steps, strengthen our resolve,
And inspire us to be agents of positive change.
Amen.

Week 5: Nature

1. Was there anything in the message this week that resonated with you or that seemed timely? What did you find surprising or uncomfortable? Was there anything you disagreed with?
2. How would you describe your interaction with nature? Can you describe a time when you have experienced God through the natural world in some way? What made this a “spiritual” experience for you and why?
3. Read Mark 1:9-13. Why do you think the spirit sends Jesus into the wilderness? Why do you think Jesus willingly goes? What wild spaces do you have in your own life? How might those spaces help you connect with God?
4. Read Matthew 6:25-30. How do Jesus’ words here make you feel? Why do you think Jesus points to birds and flowers to help us understand God’s love?
5. Spend the rest of the time doing the practice described below. If you are having this discussion as part of a group, plan some time to do the practice together and then share about your experience afterwards. Otherwise take some time on your own use the practice to help you sink into God’s presence.

Practice for the week: Experiencing God through Awareness of Nature

Find some nearby “wild space”. This could be in your yard, a local park, somewhere off the beaten track, or even the Cedar Ridge property. Take a few minutes for each step below:

Stand still and look up at the sky

- What do you see? How would you describe the color of the sky? Are there any clouds? How would you describe their shape? Can you see the moon? Can you see the sun? Imagine yourself on our spherical planet in space with the sun and moon. Allow your imagination to give you a sense of where you are in the enormity of the universe. Spend a moment in conscious awareness of this reality.
- What do you feel? What emotions does this stir in you? Where does it lead your thoughts?
- What might God be saying to you?

Look all around you up to the horizon on every side

- What do you see? How far can you see? What is your horizon, and does it seem far or close? What is the landscape like? What variety of plants, animals, and rocks can you see from where you are out to the horizon all around you? Imagine yourself on this specific part of our whole planet. Take note of your feet grounded on the earth and the pressure of your weight through them holding you to this planet. Let a sense of “groundedness” and “rootedness” hold you in this moment, in this specific place.

- What do you feel? What emotions does this stir in you? Where does it lead your thoughts?
- What might God be saying to you?

Be aware of your immediate surroundings

- Now take notice of what is right there close by and around you. Be conscious of your senses and focus on each one in turn. Be aware of the details and the subtle differences between things that may at first seem the same. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you taste? What can you touch or what touches you?
- What do you feel? What emotions does this stir in you? Where does it lead your thoughts?
- What might God be saying to you?