**“Cultivating Sacred Space” week 1: Living in Two Realities**

**Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. What practices have been most helpful to you in experiencing God? Share about your journey with this and how it has evolved over time. What have been some of your struggles with consistency in these practices?
3. Read the passage below and discuss how you relate to it personally. Can you share examples of when you have experienced life in each of these two contrary realities described here?

*My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God’s Spirit. Then you won’t feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are contrary to each other, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Why don’t you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence?*

**Romans 7:14-25 (The Message)**

1. Now read this passage and discuss how it relates to the one above. What does “abiding in Christ” mean to you? What does it look like practically?

*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*

**John 15:4-5 (NRSVUE)**

1. As a group do the practice on the back of this page. It will help if someone can guide the practice by reading each step slowly and then allowing a few minutes of silence between each one.
2. When you have finished the practice discuss how you each experienced it. What happened and how helpful was it or not? Then commit to doing this practice individually during the week. You could do it at a set time that works for you or as needed when you feel strong negative emotions.

**Practice for the week: The Welcoming Prayer**

The Welcoming Prayer is a prayer practice that helps us let go of unhealthy responses to certain emotions we are experiencing, while helping us to embrace more of God’s love.

**Step 1: Awareness**

Sit comfortably and quietly and focus on your breathing. Be present to yourself and aware of your body, your feelings, and emotions. Notice any specific emotion that feels negative and uncomfortable. Focus on it and sink into it. Go toward it rather than suppress or resist it. Stay with this step of noticing and sinking in until you really experience a connection to the feeling. You may feel it physically in your body, and it can help to place your hand there as a way of connecting with the emotion more deeply. Remember that what you are noticing and welcoming is not what triggered your feelings, but the feelings themselves.

**Step 2: Welcome**

Identify the feeling by giving it a name. It could be anxiety, fear, despair, confusion, anger, shame, guilt, sadness or any other emotion. Once you have named it, welcome it. Welcome the feeling as a friend that is going to help you discover something about yourself, rather than as an enemy to be defeated. Don’t judge yourself but simply accept how you are feeling right now. Silently say, “Welcome anger” (or whatever emotion you are feeling). Repeat it and sit with the feeling until you experience a genuine sense of owning and accepting it in this moment.

**Step 3: Acknowledge**

Now allow yourself to honestly discern where the emotion is coming from. What is the root of it? Most commonly our negative emotions come from a thwarted desire for one or more normal and basic human needs:

* Safety and security
* Esteem and affection
* Power and control

There is nothing wrong with these desires. They can be healthy and positive. All you are acknowledging is that the desire you’ve identified is not being met. As you sit in quietness, simply acknowledge and accept this.

**Step 4: Let Go**

When you have identified the desire that is not being fulfilled, let go of the demand for it. You are not letting go of the desire itself, you are not letting go of your need for it, nor your legitimate right to that desire. You are simply acknowledging that you are not getting what you desire and letting go of the demand for it in this present moment. Consciously let go of:

* Your demand for safety and security in this situation.
* Your demand for esteem and affection in this situation.
* Your demand for power and control in this situation

Surrender to the love of God and sit with this for a while. Give God the pain or disappointment you feel about that desire and let it go. You are not saying it doesn’t matter and there may be actions you need to take because of what caused this emotion, but you are letting go of your pain in this moment. Rest for a while in God’s loving, affirming and totally accepting presence.