

Friday, May 8, 2020

Turn off the outside "noise" for a couple of minutes and consider this message from God's Word.
I am praying that it calms your spirit and encourages your heart.

JOHN 16:16-22 (NIV)

¹⁶ Jesus went on to say, **"In a little while you will see me no more,** and then after a little while you will see me."

¹⁷ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, **'In a little while you will see me no more,** and then after a little while you will see me,' and **'Because I am going to the Father'?"** ¹⁸ They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, **'In a little while you will see me no more,** and then after a little while you will see me'? ²⁰ **Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.** ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: **Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**

— PART 2 —

*I found that when a passage of Scripture has been very familiar to me for a long time — such as this passage! — if I will simply **slow down** . . . take my time . . . and read thoughtfully and reflectively, it can become alive to me in new and fresh ways.*

Yesterday we reflected on **loneliness**, but distinguished it from **solitude**. Loneliness is when we feel isolated and alone; solitude is when we are away from other people but still in the presence of God. Jesus knew the difference. He predicted his follower would leave him "all alone" . . . but recognized that he wasn't *really* alone:

JOHN 16:32 (NIV)

**"You will leave me all alone.
Yet I am not alone,
for my Father is with me.**

When we understand that God is always with us, we can actually learn to enjoy solitude without feeling that overwhelming sense of loneliness and sadness.

In our "stay at home" world right now, we can cycle between times of feeling isolated — and times of feeling closed in, claustrophobic or "peopled-out," a phrase a friend once coined when they felt like they need a little time away from people. Maybe you have had one too many Zoom meetings? Maybe you are trying to **work** from home at the same time as your kids are trying to **school** from home! Maybe you are trying to **work** from home at the same time as you try to **teach** from home!

What if we decided to leverage this time to deepen our relationship with Jesus? What if we determined that this “problem” could become a gift? No matter what was going on around him, Jesus knew his relationship with his Father was solid. He had cultivated an unbreakable connection with the Father . . . so that even in a crisis he could draw upon it. He did exactly that in the Garden as he prayed, on his way to the cross, and even on the cross as he spoke with his father (remember the “seven last words of Jesus”).

The late father Henri Nouwen often wrote about the value of solitude. He once wrote a Lenten devotional called **“LIVING HERE AND NOW WITH GOD”**:



The invitation to a life of prayer is the invitation to live in the midst of this world without being caught in the net of its wounds and needs. The word ‘prayer’ stands for *a radical interruption of the vicious chain of interlocking dependencies* that leads to violence and war, and for **an entering into an entirely new dwelling place.** It points to a new way of speaking, of breathing, of being together, of knowing — truly, to a whole new way of living.

It is not easy to express the radical change that prayer represents, since for many the word prayer is associated with piety; talking to God; thinking about God; attending morning and evening worship; going to Sunday service; saying grace before meals; and many other things. All of these have **something** to do with prayer, but **prayer is the center of Christian life. It is living with God, here and now.**

Jesus, help me to find a new way of living during this Lenten time.

HENRY NOUWEN, *Solitude of the Heart: Lenten Prayer with Henri J.M. Nouwen*

What if you and I, during this season of arbitrary isolation and physical distancing, determined to use this challenge as an opportunity to get to know God better?

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*Jesus, we hear your invitation to “**come away | with Me | to a deserted place | and get some rest**” (Mark 6:31, NIV). We hear it. We welcome it. And goodness knows, we **need** that rest! Would you teach us, every day, how to **BE STILL** . . . and get to know you better? We want to experience life, here and now, **WITH** you.*

Pastor Doug