

Message: Ways to Reach God**Does anyone like to garden?**

For some of us, there’s nothing like tilling the soil, treating it, planting seeds or bulbs, and watching what happens. It’s a thrill to see life come from bare earth. No matter whether the end result is the plant, flowers or fruit, it’s a wonder of creation. The Bible compares God’s work to that of a gardener. Isaiah 55:10-11 says, *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

God’s work is like that of a gardener. God tends to creation. God works in the world for a purpose. Earlier, Isaiah reminds us God’s thoughts are higher than our thoughts, which means we wonder what God’s purpose is at times. The prophet tells the good news about what God reveals: God has a 100% success rate. This is good for us as we’re looking to grow spiritually so we bear fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22).

God isn’t just a gardener. God is a master builder (Genesis 1). God is the ruler of the universe (Revelation 4). God is also handy (Psalm 19:1). Please know this: we aren’t a hobby to God. We’re a masterwork. God loves us in many ways. There are many ways we can communicate with God and be in union with the Holy Spirit. One of them is meditation.

Meditation is the spiritual practice we’re considering this morning.

Is meditation okay? What do you think? There are many different types of meditation with many different purposes. Many use similar forms; that part of meditation crosses faith boundaries. Perhaps the best way to answer the question is to begin by looking at Scripture.

Isaac, Abraham’s son and the father of Jacob, is the first person in the Bible noted for meditation (Genesis 24:63). He had a daily practice of meditating while he was walking in the fields. While Isaac was meditating he saw the camels returning with Rebekah, who would be his wife. Not only did God keep a promise, God was a matchmaker!

Joshua, one of the two people to enter the promised land, spoke to the people out of his meditation, encouraging them to keep God’s Word in their hearts and minds, day and night (Joshua 1:8).

The psalmists encouraged meditation and reflection on what God has done (Psalm 77:12; 143:5), particularly at night or when we’re searching for answers or when we’re full of complaints (Psalm 63:6; 77:6).

Psalm 1:1-3 describes those who meditate on God’s Word,

“Happy are those ... [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” Once again we have the image of a garden, filled with fruit trees that are always green, healthy and growing. Trees are used to symbolize people in the Bible. The point is clear: meditating on God’s Word is a good, helpful and healthy spiritual practice.

In the fourth century, a group of men and women became uncomfortable with the church’s new role as the official religion of the Roman Empire. They were uncomfortable with the emerging church culture. Many of these believers began seeking a return to the passion of the first and second century. To do so, they began to live lives of solitude and prayer. They began the monastic movement. Many of these people lived as hermits, in small caves or cells. People would come to them for insight, to learn and, for some, to become disciples of the path. While they followed several spiritual practices, including chastity, abstinence and unceasing prayer, meditation was a key part of their spiritual life. This community became known as the desert mothers and fathers. Their spiritual descendants exist today.

If I asked whether you meditated last week, what would you say?

Well, if you were in church last Sunday and you participated in our divine images spiritual practice, you were meditating. There are many forms. We shouldn’t be afraid to try them. Paul taught young Timothy, *“...everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving”* (1 Timothy 4:4).

I hope you will embrace the spiritual practice. Try it and see what you learn about yourself and God.

Today, we’re going to learn another form of meditative prayer.

It’s the labyrinth. This form is good because it combines elements of meditation with movement or kinesthetics. There are different learning styles – listening and reading are two of them and movement is another. For the purposes of today’s exercise, we won’t actually be walking a labyrinth. We’re doing what’s called a finger labyrinth. You have an insert in your bulletin that I invite you to get out. If you need a copy, please raise your hand so we can get you one.

The instructions will also be on screen to guide us as we do the exercise together. There are a couple of things I want to note before we begin: one, a labyrinth is NOT a maze! A maze has false starts and dead ends. A labyrinth is one continuous path from start to finish. Second, there is nothing magic about a labyrinth. It’s a tool for us to use to help us get into the right mental and spiritual alignment so we’re open to receive God’s grace.

As we begin, let the words of St. Augustine guide you:

“Father, be the goal of my pilgrimage, and my rest by the way.”

[*spiritual exercise* – finger labyrinth]

Let us pray:

Thank you Jesus for guiding us. Stay near us as we leave this place, and remind us, when we forget, of the time we have shared here. In the name of God Almighty, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Psalm 139:5, 7, 23-24 (NRSV)

You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 8:26-27 (NRSV)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.