

There is a reason nobody ever suggests
that you meditate with your dog.
Esp. on the evening of July 4th.

DESCRIBE

That episode of meditating didn't bring either my dog
or me any peace.

But I learned what does.

I want to spend a moment redirecting our focus
On that wonderful state of peace
even in the midst of fireworks and other noisy calamities.
Let's consider how we find that state of mindfulness
and awareness of the Spirit's presence that helps us flourish?

My dog was restless and nervous,
he just couldn't find peace.
I've had many a time in this week,
let alone in my life, when I felt the same way.

The Apostle Paul knew how that felt too.
In his letter to the Romans,
he perfectly articulated this restlessness.

I don't understand my own actions,
I don't do what I want, and do the things
I don't want.

It's as if there's an inner fail button that goes off,
just when we're about to get it right.

One of my meditation instructors said,
anything we want to do for a higher good
be it exercise, or prayer, or volunteer work
these higher goods gets sabbataged by our inner ego.

That part of us that wants to
just take care of our immediate whims
as easily and gratifyingly as possible
She warned that caving into those whims
could ultimately destroy us.

We self-sabotage.

This is really easy to do,
Especially in our spiritual care.

As Christians, we are committed to the higher good.
We want to do what's right –
for our families, ourselves and our communities.

We sleep in, we forget to do that thing we committed to,
we blame others for not doing it right – so we don't do it either.

We can't get away from our own inertia
Like Paul put it: wretched human that I am,
who will rescue me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God for Jesus!
Jesus shows us the way.

We Christians embrace Jesus as both human and God.
And because of that,
he creates a bridge for us,
in our humanity,
To become more like God.
We can observe what he did and said,
And what he didn't do and didn't say,
And we can emulate that,
and draw us deeper into God.

Jesus had peace, clarity
and total allegiance to God's kingdom.
He seemed to just rest in God
even while he was supremely busy.

The three years of his ministry
Highlighted in the Gospels,

were packed full of travel,
and crowds ;
With friends that questioned him,
Demands for miracles, and answers
And all the way, the grim shadow of a disapproving
Roman Government getting stronger.

Yet Jesus had peace.
And people didn't understand it.
We sang a dirge and you didn't cry, we played a song
You didn't dance.
He wasn't like us.
He was steady within himself,
Not tossed about by the situation he was in.

The disciples observed this about him.
They saw his intimacy with God.
The way he spent many nights in solitude and prayer
And they asked him, teach us to pray.
Help us have what you have.

Now, when Jesus taught his disciples to pray,
He gave them words.
We are familiar with them:
Our Father, in heaven, hallowed by your name.

We will pray these words in a few minutes,
But there was more to the instruction.
Odds are Jesus didn't just teach the words,
He almost certainly taught them a way to use their body for prayer.

Jesus wasn't just about words,
He was about body, and embodiment.
The posture that the early church passed down to us
Is most often only used by the priest anymore'
But it's worth considering. It's this:

ORANS

And whether we still pray this way or not,
We need to bear in mind that our prayers
are not separate from our bodies.
They rise from our very core,
Our very breath and center.

All the things that Jesus said and did
were ordered from the center
And that center was the core of his being
His relationship with his father
was imprinted in his very DNA.

Jesus said, take the yoke of my teachings

And learn from me
And you too will find rest for your soul
For my yoke is easy...

As Frederick Buechner puts it
holiness is God-ness
and as such is not something people do
but something God does in them,

What I think he means there is that
the more we center ourselves
Find that God place within us,
The more we become whole –
And peaceful and clear about things
In spite of circumstances.

So here are three suggestions for finding that place:

1. Pray and breathe – by this I mean, don't just let prayer be a series of words read, or spoken in your mind, let prayer become a part of your whole body. Breathe in God, Breathe out self, let your mind be still enough that creativity and whispers of the holy to enter in.
2. Relocate your mind.
For me, sometimes my mind is all I am aware of.

I think think think, and don't stop to sense the world around me,
to really inhale the mown grass,
to really hug and be present in the hug
to relocate the mind is perhaps a way of relocating attention.

3. And speaking of Attention,
be observant of what is getting your attention
– and how much of it.

At Deaconess Anne House last Friday
we prayed the prayer of St. Theresa of Avila.

Christ has no body now but yours.

And as I prayed the part where it said,

Christ has no hands on earth but yours.

I could visualize all the stuff I was carrying in my hands.

Stuff that was pretty toxic,

and I was clutching so hard,

I realized, that my hands need to be open

and ready if they are going to be Christ's hands in this world.

So I offered the things in my hands with Jesus.

Come to me, Jesus offers,

Let me take that junk in your trunk,

That log in your eye,

That goo on your shoe,

That bomb in your palms

And let me carry that.

You beloved, you let your eyes, and feet, and hands
Be mine – to love the world,
To heal it on my behalf,
In my name.
And then your will find rest for your soul.
I tell you,
letting Jesus carry my burdens,
has freed me.

Rest gives us peace, and confidence
It opens new places for creativity and playfulness,
It makes us able to be kind and generous.
It even helps us sleep.

On July 4th, when Dingo, my dog, couldn't settle down,
I finally gave up on my meditation efforts.
I was tired of having him pace from one corner to another,
all the while jumping over me.
So I picked him up,
and lay down on the bed with him in my arms.
Soon enough, being held in my arms, he quieted.
He even slept. He had found rest.

Friends, we are restlessly tossed to and fro

by the fireworks of life.

But our Divine Caretaker,
full of unfailing love and care for each of us,
is waiting to hold us, to help still us, so we can rest.

So this week, practice mindful breathing,
Find a posture for prayer that draws you into rest
And make a change in your awareness
so that you get outside the kingdom of your mind.

When you do, you will find God waiting.

AMEN