

If You Want To Know

Scripture text: Luke 9:28-45
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Center Church on the Green, New Haven, Conn.
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I remember the first time I experienced a spiritual retreat. I was 19 years old and with a group of friends I had signed up for a two day retreat at a monastery in southern Vermont.

Unlike almost every other group encounter I'd ever had, there was no chore list to add my name to on the way in. There were no assignments of any kind, really. There was nothing to read, nothing to prepare, nothing expected of me, except to be there. If I wanted to sing along with the musicians I could. Or I could just listen. If I wanted to share a thought in a group session, I was free to do that. Or not. Meals were served, snacks were freely available.

And in that beautiful setting on a Vermont hillside, there was space to listen, to breathe, to relax.

My friends and I were quiet on the drive home. You'd think we would be talking and laughing and comparing notes. But no. Just silence.

Of course, Monday came, with alarm clocks and early breakfasts and the scramble to complete class assignments that had

been put aside for the weekend. And the silence gave away soon enough. But unlike almost every other Monday since I had started my college studies there was something different about me, something different inside me. For the first time I felt calm and relaxed about the tasks the day was bringing.

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It would be great if we could live in a spiritually elevated space all the time. You might have your own name for that: an inner calm...your quiet place...the home you've given to God's Holy Spirit.

Whatever it might be, and whether or not you get there often, reaching that state of being seems wonderful when we are there, and oh-so-hard to achieve when we are not. In a stressful and noisy world it is hard to find quiet places.

I saw some research statistics about the practice of yoga the other day. I don't have a strong opinion about yoga one way or the other, and I don't think of it as a religion in any way. But I did learn that about 1 in 10 Americans practice yoga in some form or another, and some of the reasons why they do are, um, enlightening.

About 6 in 10 people started practicing yoga to improve their physical flexibility. You may snicker every time you hear the phrase

“downward-facing dog” but if you can actually do that pose you’ve become more flexible.

About half of the people who participate in yoga sessions are there to relieve stress. You can’t help but feeling less stressed when all you are being asked to do is breathe.

There’s something called “laughter yoga.” You might have a hard time telling it apart from just plain laughter, but 20 percent of yoga participants want to give it a try.

All of this comes at a price: for practitioners, clothing, accessories, equipment, and classes. People in our country spent eleven and half billion dollars on yoga last year, and the average yoga practitioner will spend \$62,640 during their lifetime on the discipline.¹

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That’s how much many of us want to find some inner connection to spirituality, and for Christians an experience of God’s Spirit. The chapels and sanctuaries of the past are now more individualized experiences.

But whether it’s a classic New England meetinghouse or a sweaty hot yoga session—whether it’s a small group sitting in

¹ <https://moderngentlemen.net/yoga-statistics/> , 2021 edition; retrieved from the Web 2/13/2021.

chairs around a circle or an online Zoom session; the peace we may achieve in those few minutes is challenged by the realities surrounding us. The news alerts from Washington have gotten a little less urgent recently, but the everyday challenges of staying healthy and living well in a pandemic have been magnified by the competition to receive a vaccination. Hope for help being on the way has strengthened even as the need for that help has intensified.

We want help. We want that inner peace. We want to be fortified, so we can face life's realities with something other than panic and dread.

Being fortified helps us go on.

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Now, every year, preachers need to approach the episode of Jesus transfigured on the mountaintop. It's an easy way out to talk about the "memorials" or "booths" that Peter, John, and James wanted to build on the mountain when they grasped they were seeing Moses and Elijah with their teacher.

Luke turns us away from this kind of discussion by telling us that Peter had simply "blurted this out without thinking" [33]. It's like a reflex that has to fire before they can start taking it in.

And once they do, once they start taking in the reality of being in God's presence, the kind of inner peace descends upon them

that a novice yogi can only dream of. There is a cloud glowing with light, a voice that commands them to listen to Jesus, and in the echoes, the apparition fades away.

They are speechless. And they continue to have no speech, no comment on what they've seen. It's all inside. And that's what Luke wants us to focus on, because things can all come crashing down so quickly.

The awful circumstances of the boy brought to Jesus, the screams and convulsions and foaming at the mouth, are enough to make most people want to run away, to block up their ears and shield their eyes. But Peter, John, and James are still living in their hushed silence, maybe wishing just a bit that they'd stayed up on the mountainside.

Luke tells us they are astonished when Jesus is able to heal the boy, to bring him into his right mind, to hand the boy's life back over to his father. Their astonishment is different, though. It is grounded in a new understanding, listening for what the actions of Jesus are saying to them.

They are lost, lost in wonder, awe, and praise.

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If you want to know Jesus, you need to take in both the wonder of the mountainside and the terror of the everyday. Recognizing

Jesus opens a window for us. Through that window flows the gifts we need, of recognition and wonder and understanding. It does not require us to do anything, but to keep the window open.

Surrounding ourselves with the gifts from Jesus' Spirit that flow in through that window helps us navigate the terrors and sorrows we face. It helps us with our own pains, and setbacks, and disappointments. Our grief is not faced alone. Our empathy for others grows and turns into a helping hand.

If we really want to know who Jesus is in our lives, we need to see his radiance and to listen for his guidance. We need to heed the voice that says "Listen to him!" We need to bring that guidance into the everyday stress we face, and into our understanding of our own call as a follower of Christ's way.

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If we want to know Jesus, really know him, we need to talk less and listen more. We need to allow his Spirit in through the window to our heart. We need to embrace his love.

For His sake. Amen.