



Pillar Journal

Vol. 6 No. 2

Lent

“...the liturgical traditions of the Church, all its cycles and services, exist, first of all, in order to help us recover the vision and the taste of that new life which we so easily lose and betray, so that we may repent and return to it. ... It is through her liturgical life that the Church reveals to us something of that which “the ear has not heard, the eye has not seen, and what has not yet entered the heart of man, but which God has prepared for those who love Him.” And in the center of that liturgical life, as its heart and climax, as the sun whose rays penetrate everywhere, stands Resurrection.”

*— Alexander Schmemmann,
Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*

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Lent 2024

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In the Journal

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Centering Prayer

Poem, Prayer, Song

Lent 2024

Hello.

Welcome back to this little corner of the life of Pillar Church.

This season of Lent we are focusing on a theme called Centered.

In the journal you will find some reflections and prompts for prayer that invite us into a life that is centered in Christ.

As you walk through the season, whatever your journey looks like, we at Pillar want to hear about it. Is there a written, visual, musical, or otherwise expression of your practice of prayer and devotion that you'd be willing to share? Whatever it is, send it over to music@pillarchurch.com and we'd love to find a way to offer it back to the Pillar community.

Peace, and a good Lent to you,
Jonathan Gabhart

Use this QR code to access digital/audio versions of the contents of the journal on our website



Artist Statement - Valerie Spoelhof

It started with a tree in the center
and it was finished on a tree — center stage

Jesus' love draws us to be centered with him, rooted in God's
Word, following God's will in our lives

For “He is before all things and in him all things hold together.”
“And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether
things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through
the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1)

CENTERED

Pastor Jon Brown

Eugene Peterson's words in a book titled *Reversed Thunder* startle me:

“Failure to worship consigns us to a life of spasms and jerks, at the mercy of every advertisement, every seduction, every siren. Without worship we live manipulated and manipulating lives. We move in either frightened panic or deluded lethargy as we are, in turn, alarmed by specters and soothed by placebos. If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose.”

His warning is well heeded. To be clear, he's not referring simply to showing up to church for an hour on Sunday, though corporate gatherings of worship are a catalyst for the kind of life he's suggesting. He's calling us to a life oriented to God, a life centered in Christ. Without which we're reduced to “spasms and jerks,” the “vast restlessness” that so many of us know so well. The Surgeon General diagnosed the “restlessness” as “an epidemic of loneliness in America.” David Brooks, New York Times columnist and best-selling author, highlights it this way, “Between 1990 and 2018, the share of Americans who put themselves in the lowest happiness category increased by more than 50 percent.” That state of our national public discourse, the reality of our political climate and the stories coming from our own neighborhoods and homes is all the evidence I need that Peterson is diagnosing our lives like a skilled physician.

None of this is new. The circumstances and storylines are unique to our moment but the reality of “spasms and jerks,” of a “vast restlessness” has been around for a long time. Christians have known it. We have tried to prepare. We even put it on the calendar. It’s called Lent.

Lent the 40 days, not including Sundays, that precede Resurrection celebrations, is meant to be a season to center ourselves. To orient our lives to God. It has been a season in which Christians have recommitted themselves to the basic practices that have sustained Christ followers for 2000 years: prayer, fasting and generosity.

This Lenten season we’re inviting you on a journey out of the “spasms and jerks,” out of the “vast restlessness” into the center. We’re calling it, “Centered on Christ in a fragmented world.” We’re borrowing from St. Paul who wrote, “Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” If you’re tired of being tired. If you’ve noticed how quickly you can become irritable. If you’re aware of how distracted your heart is or can be. If you’re aware of the pull on your life in so many directions that leave you feeling more like Gumby than a human being, now is the time, this could be the moment, Lent is for you.

From my vantage point, the world does not need any more people pulled every which way, out of breath and exhausted, but longs for a few folks who are awake, alive, centered. Lent.



These blank pages are open for written or illustrated reflection and prayer on our theme for the Lent season...





SABBATH

Pastor Joel Boersma

When I was in third grade, it was my Grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary. To celebrate this amazing milestone, they took our whole family—aunts, uncles, and cousins included—on an out West adventure. From Custer National Park and the Badlands to Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone, then to Jackson Hole and the Grand Tetons as our final destination.

In impeccable 1990s family trip form, we traveled around the great American West in matching crew neck sweatshirts with “Jubilee 50” embroidered on them. Orange sweatshirts with blue print for the adults; blue sweatshirts and orange print for the kids. (The colors, you might guess, were a tribute to a certain Alma Matter.)

In the Bible, the Year of Jubilee occurred every seventh Sabbath cycle (i.e., 50 years). When it was Jubilee 50—the “Sabbath of sabbaths”—debts were forgiven, slaves and bonded laborers were freed, and land was redistributed for a just and flourishing common life.

Remember the Sabbath: I wonder what comes to mind when you hear that phrase.

Some might think of bygone days where nobody in town could mow the lawn. My dad recounted to me that he wasn't permitted to play sports with friends on Sunday until he was in high school. My Sabbath memories are more positive, such as a long nap after church, playing catch in the backyard, and days out at the Lake.

The word Sabbath means to cease, to stop, or to quit. Back at the beginning God finished all the work he had done in creation, and then God “sabbath-ed.” God rested and so Sabbath is. The Genesis creation words are later transposed into the 10 Commandments that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai.

As the story continues, Sabbath references abound: in Leviticus, meticulous attention is given to Sabbath and sabbatical periods to orient Israel's worship and social life (like “Jubilee 50”). In Deuteronomy, we get a 10 Commandments remix with God's people on the brink of the promised land. Sabbath is also at the heart of many Psalms.

Then when Jesus comes on the scene in the Gospels, he challenges the letter of the Law and the spirit of Sabbath in particular. After Jesus' Resurrection, the early Church debates the place, meaning and practice of Sabbath as it relates to the Lord's Day—that is, Sunday, the “eighth day”: new creation.

I. Play

Back to the Genesis of creation: God said “let there be”, and there was: light and darkness, lands and seas; the sun, the moon and the stars set in place, waters swarming and birds flying and creatures appearing in all kinds, shapes and sizes.

Playing reflects the creative activity of God. As mentioned, Sabbath means to cease, but it also means to delight. Sabbath play, therefore, invites a wholehearted posture of wonder rather than doubt, freedom rather than legalism.

During my first year of graduate school I decided to take Greek, even though it was the subject that gave me the most dread. Every Friday we were tested over all that was covered for the week: vocabulary, grammar, paradigms and so on. Immediately after class, at 2:20pm, my fellow seminarians and I would book it over to the Wilson Center to run off some steam with a few hours of pickup basketball. One friend, with his characteristic chutzpah, practiced a textbook 24-hour Sabbath, beginning after Greek (his de facto Friday sundown), and finishing the next day.

Eugene Peterson wrote that “culture is healthy only when it plays. Play is a distinctive mode of activity for humans. When we repress or neglect play, we dehumanize culture” (Peterson, *Working the Angles*).

Sabbath play is a good gift from God. It is an invitation to image God's rest, delight, freedom, and ultimately, God's blessing on creation.

II. Pray

Where playing reflects God the Creator, praying calls on God the deliverer. As mentioned the Sabbath commandment remix of Deuteronomy 5 begins with the familiar language of Exodus 20, but then throws a curve-ball: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."

Here is a shift from the creation words of Genesis to the liberation story of Exodus, where God delivered his people from 400 years of slavery and ceaseless toil. Praying reveals our need for God's deliverance, "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."

We live in a time and place that banks on constant stimulation and unending activity. I've noticed a pattern that goes something like this: targeted messaging, via screens, to acquire more stuff. That stuff, then, promises to appease the appetites of the self with its replacement trinity of holy needs, holy wants and holy feelings. Sabbath praying calls for deliverance from screens, stuff, and the "sovereign self."

In a book that is popular among college students, the author writes: “The Sabbath is like a guerrilla warfare tactic. If you want to break free from the oppressive yoke of Egypt’s taskmaster and its restless, relentless lust for more, just take a day each week and stick it to the man...Above all, slow down long enough to enjoy life with God, who offers everything that materialism promises but can never deliver on.”

(Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*).

III. Hope

The sure and certain hope, finally, is that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. We are given this good news by three Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

That Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath gives us hope. Hope for deliverance from the scripts of culture. Hope for freedom to go the way of the King and his Kingdom.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and that is our hope, because Jesus is Lord of all. His Sabbath rest between the Cross and the Resurrection ushered in the first fruits of what the old theologians called the Eternal Sabbath: “There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the Kingdom of which there is no end?” (Augustine)





“Worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God. Failure to worship consigns us to a life of spasms and jerks, at the mercy of every advertisement, every seduction, every siren. Without worship we live manipulated and manipulating lives... If there is no center, there is no circumference. People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose.”

- Eugene Peterson from “Reversed Thunder”

CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer is an ancient Christian practice that helps us move toward a posture/practice of being centered in God. The following reflection is borrowed from “The Praying Church Idea Book” by Douglas Kamstra. Let it be a guide and encouragement to your own prayer practice this Lent!

Centering prayer is an attempt to eliminate the “outside noises” (lawns being mowed, children talking in the background, breakfast being prepared in the kitchen) and the “inside noises” (thoughts about things that didn’t get done, plans for tomorrow, things we said or shouldn’t have said). Before we can effectively listen for God, we must put away the distractions. Centering prayer helps us focus on where we are and who we are—what the devotional masters often call “recollection.” (The Quakers know this process as “centering down.”) Centering prayer cultivates a receptiveness to the quiet whisperings of God. As we listen with our whole being—heart, mind, soul, and strength we place God at the center so that our whole, undistracted being focuses on him. Centering prayer usually involves focusing on a “sacred word” such as a name or attribute of God and repeating it over and over very slowly. After settling into a quiet place, say the word as an invitation to God’s presence. Whenever distracting thoughts enter your mind, repeat the word in order to refocus your thoughts. End the prayer with two or three minutes of additional silence.

Richard Foster talks about a simple focusing exercise he calls “palms down, palms up.” To begin this exercise, place your palms down as a symbol of your desire to release all your concerns to God. Inwardly you may pray, “Lord, I give you my anger toward Bob. I surrender my anxiety over not having enough money to pay the bills this month. I release my frustration with my daughter this afternoon.” After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord, Pray silently, “Lord, I would like to receive your divine love for Bob, your peace about my finances, your patience with my daughter.” Having “centered down,” spend the remaining moments in complete silence.

From *The Praying Church Idea Book*
published by Faith Alive Christian Resources



*Reflect on Pastor Joel's encouragement to "Play...
maybe draw something, or maybe playfully re-create the rose window
in full color in the picture to the left.*

Write and reflect on your own Centering Prayer practice here...



A Poem

A Prayer

A Song

Consider the poem, prayer, and song on the following pages as you practice being Centered in Christ. There is blank space to write your own poem, prayer, or song on page 34. Perhaps you would be willing to share it with Pillar when you are done!

Blessing the Dust
Jan Richardson

All those days
you felt like dust,
like dirt,
as if all you had to do
was turn your face
toward the wind
and be scattered
to the four corners

or swept away
by the smallest breath
as insubstantial—

did you not know
what the Holy One
can do with dust?

This is the day
we freely say
we are scorched.

This is the hour
we are marked
by what has made it
through the burning.

This is the moment
we ask for the blessing
that lives within
the ancient ashes,
that makes its home
inside the soil of
this sacred earth.

So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are

but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made
and the stars that blaze
in our bones
and the galaxies that
spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.

Almighty God,
your dear Son did not ascend to joy
until he first suffered pain,
and did not enter into glory
before he was crucified.
Mercifully grant that we,
walking in the way of the cross,
may find it as the true way
of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.
Amen.

- Book of Common Prayer

I Want Jesus to Walk With Me



I want Je - sus _____ to walk with me;
In my tri - als, _____ Lord, walk with me;
When I'm in trou - ble, _____ Lord, walk with me;



I want Je - sus _____ to walk with me; _____
in my tri - als, _____ Lord, walk with me; _____
When I'm in trou - ble, _____ Lord, walk with me; _____



All a - long my _____ pil - grim jour - ney,
when my heart is _____ al - most break - ing,
when my head is _____ bowed in sor - row,



— Lord, I want Je - sus _____ to walk with me.
— Lord, I want Je - sus _____ to walk with me.
— Lord, I want Je - sus _____ to walk with me.

Blank space to compose your own
Lent poem, prayer, or song....



Lent Resources
for Further Exploration and
Continued Enjoyment

Books:

Lent: The Season of Repentance and
Renewal by Esau McCauley

Great Lent: Journey to Pascha
by Alexander Schmemmann

Liturgical/Prayer Resources:

Between Midnight and Dawn:
A Literary Guide to Prayer for Lent,
Holy Week, and Eastertide
by Sarah Arthur

Music:

Lent Hymns: Paul Zach

Speak to Us: Rachel Wilhelm



He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

COLOSSIANS 1

