

## **Week 3 – Encountering Jesus & Discernment**

Here's the question that focuses this week's talk: How do we encounter Jesus in a way that we are changed: we're wiser, more compassionate, more at peace, more empowered to live abundantly? (And how do we not do the opposite?)

### **A Glimpse into Truth**

This is what I am calling a "glimpse into truth." With our imaginations we are looking to Jesus, acknowledging his presence, perhaps telling him our thoughts/feelings or at least being aware of our honest selves in whatever situation we are bringing to him, and then we're looking/listening/sensing for a glimpse of truth.

### **Help for the Right-Brain Challenged**

For some people, once the pump is primed by imaginative prayer, these glimpses into truth will simply flow easily and naturally. These are not better or more spiritual people; they are people who for whatever reason are naturally able to dial down the left brain and keep it out of the way, hopefully only until needed (which is the discernment which comes later).

For the rest of us, here are some tips to dial down the left brain:

- 1) We intentionally and sincerely invite Jesus' presence and ask him to guide the prayer time. Then we choose to trust that he is able to do this and will honour this invitation and request.
- 2) If we are people who are especially prone to wanting to stay in control, we might spend a little more time on this step, acknowledging our hesitation or fear of trusting God to be in control of this time. Perhaps we might even ask God to help us see what this fear or hesitation is about. Some will need to do this together with people they trust first before they can do it on their own.
- 3) We remind ourselves that we will do more careful discernment later and it is ok to let happen what will happen first.
- 4) We give up worrying about the boundary between our spirit and God's spirit, remembering that the more time our spirit and the Holy Spirit are dancing and hanging out with each other the less difference there will be anyway (and, again, we'll be doing the discernment later anyway).
- 5) Try to encourage a more playful and open attitude to the whole experience. Don't evaluate or judge ourselves or the process. Leanne Payne would often quote a teacher of hers who would always say something like, "You can't kiss someone properly and think about it at the same time."
- 6) Remember that the left brain will always be biased toward past understandings. Rational deduction is one of the only ways for the left brain to get to new understandings and we've often long reached our limits on this score. Trusting a right-brained experience can help free us from ruts.

## Discernment

I can't recall a single episode of demonic interference that I recognized while practicing the presence of Jesus during something like inner healing prayer. I suspect if the Enemy is at work here, it is focused on shutting down the process through fear and resistance. Two most likely distortions to watch out for:

- 1) Occasionally people will **project fears or expectations from unhealthy cultural or parental understandings onto God.**
- 2) Even more occasionally we **project our own unhealthy desires onto God.**

Based on a foundation of a commitment to and experience with the Christian story: Scripture – especially the New Testament, healthy Christian tradition, and Christian community, we can ask ourselves these questions:

- Does it seem more likely that an experience is coming from negative emotions like fear, guilt, shame, anger, bitterness rather than Jesus?
- Does Jesus' presence seem more like my parents or an embodiment of my culture than like the Jesus of the gospels?
- Will the prayer experience lead toward or away from life or *shalom*? (I.e. a well-rounded, biblical picture of the kind of fullness of peaceful, harmonious life that God intends for us.)
- Does the Jesus I imagined "smell like Jesus" – does the experience line up with the kinds of things we see of Jesus in the gospels (with appropriate cultural shifts)?

### **Discernment questions not to ask (if the above all seem ok)**

- Is this only my own imagination?
- Is this supernatural or am I "pretending"?

In other words, discerning between the godly parts of our own intuition and imagination and what we intuitively and imaginatively hear from the Holy Spirit is, for the most part, impossible and usually unnecessary.

### **Homework – Four Steps:**

- 1) Think of some situation or decision or something like that which is causing you particular stress or making you upset – something that has been consciously bothering you lately.
- 2) Remember a time when you felt the presence of Jesus with you. Take a minute or two to recall this moment deeply and what it felt like. Give thanks for it.
- 3) Bring 1 and 2 together – perhaps by telling Jesus about the situation while imaginatively recalling the time he was particularly present with you. Invite and allow Jesus to be present to that situation, perhaps responding in some way.
- 4) For the sake of discernment and accountability for what you gained, do something objective with the results. Either talk about them with a friend (or email me) or journal them.