

“Dare to Care: Awareness of Our Souls”
Mark 1:35-37

A few years ago, I watched the movie “Wit” starring Emma Thompson. I normally stay away from highly emotional movies, but this one was an amazing gift that brought me tears but also an affirmation about the human soul and our need to nurture it. The story line is that of an English Literature professor who believed so strongly in the power of the intellect to the point of ignoring anything emotional or spiritual. She lived most of her life oblivious to the pain of others and to her own inner world because she was so focused on her own mind and career. Things changed dramatically when she was diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer. Through the course of her illness, she developed a deep appreciation for the power of compassion and the need to deal with the internal stuff of life, what we in religious circles tend to call the soul. Here are two clips. The first one is of Vivian’s interaction with her nurse.

https://youtu.be/48PHh_xVc

The second clip is of Vivian’s reflection on what was going on within her:

<https://youtu.be/yf14rMLKFu0>

Vivian no longer saw herself as an intellectual being with a mind and a body. She was finally able to see herself as a human being with body, mind, and soul. Soul is one of the hardest things to define for us as human beings because it is something that is deep within us. It is the essence of who we are and yet it remains invisible. We could go for days and even years without being in touch with or aware of our souls, the very presence of God within us.

There are many challenges for our ability to access that mysterious presence of the divine in our beings such as busyness, personality/ego fears, focusing only on our thoughts and feelings, our need for control, and our lack of compassion or appreciation for ourselves and inner world. Our whole sermon series about the Enneagram and personality types was a way to help us understand and release some of the ways we hinder our ability to live soulfully.

And so this week as we continue to journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross, we are going to look at his example of compassion for his own soul. We often focus on Jesus’ actions or words of compassion for others, yet the Gospels also mention several times how Jesus got away from the crowds to be by himself and to pray. In today’s Bible story, we hear about Jesus taking time away to rest and to pray.

The Gospel of Mark is known for its brevity. It is the shortest Gospel and is often known for the word “immediately” which is used 42 times in this brief book. Yet, even as Mark tried to keep the story of Jesus short and focused, he took the time to mention several episodes of Jesus getting away for rest or for prayer. The Gospel writer saw that it was an important part of the story of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had a lot of people looking for him. He had incredible gifts for teaching, preaching, healing, and changing the world. He could have fallen into the illusion that compassion is all about the outside world. But

Jesus knew better. He had a long preparation for public ministry. He was steeped in the prayer traditions of his religion. Sabbath keeping was not something to be taken lightly in the Jewish faith. Prayer time and rest were essential parts of one's life because the soul and the spiritual life were not seen as commodities to help one live a good life. They were seen as the very goal and forces of life. A vital inner life was at the heart of one's success in life. That does not mean that everyone in the time of Jesus really got it because people back then had problems just the same way we do today. The disciples struggled with Jesus' taking time to pray or to sleep. They wanted him to always be on the go. While he was asleep in the boat they faced a storm, they woke him up and demanded action. In our story for today, they "hunted for him." They knew his practices of prayer and his need to be away from others. Yet, they fell under the spell of needing to have him act and to have compassion on others.

This week, I dare you to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Compassion begins in our souls and if we are to live compassionate lives, we must have a deep awareness of our souls. In her book *Boundless Compassion*, Joyce Rupp asks this probing and powerful question, "When is the last time you fully welcomed yourself into your own heart?" She goes on to say, "Self-compassion implies giving ourselves a worthy share of attentive care." Then she quotes Christina Feldman, "Exploring your inner world, the relationships you form with all that arises in your body, heart, and mind you discover a microscopic view of the relationship you form with all of life. Within this inner world, you sow the seeds of the compassionate heart or the alienated heart...The training ground of boundless compassion is in all the small moments in which you meet the painful and difficult within your own life that you are prone to deny or reject."

Our awareness of our souls is so essential for our capacity for compassion in the world. Part of the challenge is that it takes time and a lot of letting go. I love the teachings of Parker Palmer about the soul. Let's watch this video:

<https://youtu.be/i8PxnEILu8E>

Palmer writes that "The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek."

So today in continuing to use the image of the "Tree of Compassion", I would like you to consider what helps you grow in your awareness of your soul. Maybe today reflect on the roots as an apt image for the soul. They are invisible yet so important and essential for the life of the tree. Let's share some of what helps grow in our awareness of our roots, our soul.

I would like to end with an invitation from an unlikely fictional character: Winnie the Pooh. In the movie "Christopher Robin", Winnie the Pooh reminds Christopher to go back to his roots, to the time in his life when he spent time in the woods and in imaginative play. He

reminds all of us that it is important for us to take this kind of time which may seem wasteful to the world, but which can transform us into the best version of ourselves: The version God intended for each us:

<https://youtu.be/n3FxnuerJcA>

“Doing nothing often leads to the very best something.” Amen.