

Hermitage Living: A New Reliance on the Inner Life

An Autumn in-person offering in the Chapel Garden on six Sunday afternoons beginning September 27th, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. (Limited to ten participants, with possible Zoom availability for others). Leadership shared by the Christ Church Contemplative Life Ministry.

The pandemic and partial lockdown have left us less scheduled, more alone (or a great deal less so!), often anxiously waiting for normalcy to return. The situation is disorienting, discouraging at times, but also surprisingly fruitful. In some respects, it echoes the lives embraced by the church's early hermits and later monks and nuns who sought, and seek, God in solitude and simplicity. These Christians found, and find, that when outer involvements recede, an inner space opens up, creating broader possibilities for knowing ourselves and knowing God.

With 20th century monk Thomas Merton as our guide (specifically his book, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*), we will come together to consider, through silent prayer, journaling and quiet conversation, what happens when we attune the inner ear to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. (The book will be recommended, but in no way required, with excerpts provided in a hand-out each week.)

We will hold in mind such questions as: How is Christian contemplative practice similar to and different from that of Eastern religions and from the “mindfulness” now pursued in so many 21st century contexts? Is there a contemplative perspective or mode of being that goes beyond specific contemplative practices? What is the relationship between contemplation and action (a topic of great importance to Merton and other monastics)? And how does the inner life take on particular importance when the outer world is in turmoil and when one feels cut off from the human family?

The active ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was shaped by a fundamentally contemplative outlook. Through a Christian lens, the phenomenon our culture now names *mindfulness* moves us toward an expanded capacity for compassion, for availability, for loving action in the world.

Parishioners are encouraged to attend any OR all of the series (no need to sign up for all sessions), but to comply with parish/Diocesan coronavirus protocols, reserving a seat ahead of time will be required week-by-week.

For questions and registration week-by-week, please contact Merrill Carrington at carrington.merrill@gmail.com.