

The Feast of the Transfiguration: 8/6/17  
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*“Lord, it is good for us to be here.”*

Are you familiar with the term “monkey mind”?

It’s a Buddhist expression which describes an overly active mind that flits like a screeching monkey swinging from one branch to another to another... all in our heads.  
Sound familiar?

I admit I’ve had quite a bad case of “monkey mind” lately.  
And I’ve finally decided to try to be gentle with myself about it.  
After all, within the past six months I’ve had two surgeries (minor, thank God, but still time-consuming).  
Here at church we’re busy hiring three out of six staff positions.  
That, in addition to the usual stresses and distractions we all experience.

So, yes, that screeching monkey has been working overtime in my mind this summer.  
But we all struggle with this to one degree or another at various points.

Today – the rarity of the Feast of the Transfiguration falling on a Sunday – is real grace to us in the struggle against “monkey mind”.  
It interrupts our summer routine and brightens things up (pun intended) with a *feast day* during the dog days of August.

You may know the story of the Transfiguration since it normally falls elsewhere in our liturgical calendar.  
It’s usually in the frozen tundra of winter (the last Sunday after the Epiphany, to be precise) that we hear this story of Jesus taking the disciples Peter, John and James with him high upon a mountain to pray.  
There, his appearance is transfigured into a dazzling light.  
He’s suddenly accompanied by the great prophets Moses and Elijah, forerunners of the Messiah.  
The disciples are stunned to see Jesus revealed in all his glory.

“Master, it is good for us to be here,” says Peter –  
 and if only he’d stopped there!  
 But Peter keeps talking, nervously,  
 about making three dwellings as if he could somehow contain  
 these larger-than-life luminaries.  
 Peter spoke, it says, “without knowing what he said.”  
 This, my friends, is the unfortunate point where  
 “monkey mind” becomes . . . *monkey mouth*.

But as this happens, Peter and the others are overshadowed by a cloud.  
 An unfamiliar place. A break in their routine. Kinda’ scary.  
 And it’s here they realize they’re in the presence of God  
 who’s been there all along.  
 And they kept silent.

This story tells us something we may already know --  
 that one of the best antidotes to “monkey mind” is silence.  
 Stopping the outer noise, our busy-ness, our gadgets,  
 long enough to break our routines, go into a deeper place,  
 and spend a few blessed moments doing *absolutely nothing*.  
 Nothing. Except breathing and being.

We won’t always – we may never – be as fortunate as those disciples  
 who heard the voice of God loud and clear upon that mountain that day.  
 But that’s ok.

Just clearing the decks of our lives to make room  
 for the possibility is enough.  
 It’s enough to clear our minds in order to see the world more clearly,  
 and sense God’s presence with us amid the tumult.  
 That’s enough. That’s *a lot*.

I believe that how regularly you do this is at least as important  
 as how long you spend doing it.  
 If you’ve never kept intentional silence before, then three or five minutes  
 a day might be a good start.  
 And then ten minutes. Then fifteen or twenty, even thirty.  
 But the key is consistency.  
 (And, frankly, that’s what I’ve lost track of amid all the upheaval

in my life this summer.)

Sometimes breathing deeply and appreciating every breath will suffice. Sometimes you might want to use a mantra, a simple word or phrase, repeated gently again and again.

Yes, that monkey might show up grasping for another branch to distract us. But that's ok. Don't panic – just keep doing what you've chosen to do.

One thing I find helpful is a kitchen timer. I set it for the minutes I want to protect. This helps me focus because I know there's a finite time I've decided upon in advance, so I need to make the most of it. Notice I don't use the timer on my phone. For me, a cellphone is big fat "monkey mind" generator so I keep it out of reach.

Now, since I just happen to have my timer with me, let's try it. Let's practice a few moments of intentional quietude. If this is something you already do, well here are a few bonus moments. If this is new to you, better still – may it be the first of many days of intentional quiet time.

I've set the timer for a limited period given our time constraints here. I'd love to see you try a bit longer on your own. But for now I invite you to sit comfortably in your seat, perhaps put your palms out on your lap or by your side in a posture of openness, of receptivity. In honor of the Feast of the Transfiguration, I suggest we consider using Peter's phrase, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Can we say it out-loud together now? *"Lord, it is good for us to be here."*

Now during the quiet, when you're saying it silently to yourself, maybe you'll mean it literally – that it *is* good for you to be here in this beautiful holy place this morning.

Maybe you'll mean it with a sense of thanksgiving for simply waking up and being alive today.

Or maybe for you it's the realization that no matter where you are in life,  
God is with you.

Or maybe it's just a string of pleasant words to help you focus.

"Lord, it is good for us to be here."

Most of all, just breath, slowly and deeply,  
trusting that this may be the most important thing you do all day.

[Two-three minutes of quiet ended by timer]

*O God, who on that holy mount revealed your well-beloved Son wonderfully transfigured,  
in raiment white and glistening: Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the  
disquietude of this world, may behold him in all his beauty. **Amen.***

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