

A Quiet Centre, Wrong that Feels So Strong, and Moving
from a Duality of Despair to a Perichoresis of Possibility
[1 Kings 19](#) & [Ephesians 6](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church
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A Quiet Centre,

Wrong that Feels So Strong,

and Moving from a Duality of Despair to a Perichoresis of Possibility

This mouthful of a sermon title

Comes from two lines from two of my favourite hymns

And a prescient piece of advice I received by a mentor and teacher

Early this week as I was expressing the challenge of transitioning back to work from time away.

This is my first Sunday back after 4 weeks away on holidays.

It was a lovely time and I am grateful to have an occupation which allows for

And priorities restorative time

(and recognize this as a privilege)

It was four weeks of idyllic campsites surrounded by boreal forest

Early morning cups of coffee drank sitting on the rocks of the Canadian Shield

Refreshing dips in the clear cool water of Lake Superior

(nice lake, bit presumptuous on the name though)

Quiet sunsets fishing off docks

Plenty of moments for the soul to be revived

Plenty of moments which reflect my favourite hymn *Come and Find the Quiet Centre*

https://hymnary.org/text/come_and_find_the_quiet_center

*Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see*

*all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.*

Of course, beyond the most Instagram-able moments, there was also times of challenge

An overworked clutch/transmission deciding it needed a break as a thunderstorm was rolling in

3 kids in the back seat of a car for hours at a time during which sibling's feet which inexplicitly found their way to the faces of other siblings even when buckled into a rear facing car seat which caused no small consternation.

There was also some downright scary news updates.

We travelled through the Northern Ontario Forest Fires, and while we were never close enough to be in danger, there was the smell of smoke in the air, Hotels in Thunder Bay were packed with folks evacuated.

Meanwhile news of the same and worse in Northern SK, interior BC as well as devastating flooding in Europe

We visited friends of friends on a small Northern farm who were struggling with enough water during an unprecedented drought while we saw news reports of farmers here doing the same.

Then the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change releases a report calling a code red for humanity.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-58130705>

We learned about the term eco-anxiety, a name for that feeling of existential despair.

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-aug-18-2021-1.6144647/eco-anxiety-activists-want-to-shift-the-conversation-from-doom-and-gloom-to-hope-1.6142814>

Time away from work reminds me that I, like others, perhaps even some here, know that I have tendencies towards relying on work/tasks/and vocation defined by occupation to *soothe/avoid* personal challenge, pain, shame, grief...

This has been particularly clear to me over a time of changed patterns in which the line between home and office, role and parenthood (perhaps I might say compartmentalizing tendencies) have been blurry, or harder to hold.

Add in the complexities of Brain chemistry, Family history, Learned proclivities towards worry and negative self-talk, an anxious-avoidant attachment style...and a learned tendency stigmatizing struggle and valorizing self-sufficiency...

An idealized image of how one who "has it together" should respond and move through the world

There is a line in another of my favourite hymns, *This is God's Wondrous World*

<https://hymnary.org/hymn/VU1996/296>

*This is God's wondrous world:
O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is God's wondrous world:
why should my heart be sad?
Let voices sing, let the heavens ring:
God reigns, let earth be glad!*

I wonder about this part...

*O let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.*

Whether the way that this can be picked up might not always serve us well.

As if Faith means never being shaken.

Like fear and faith are incompatible opponents.

It's not often that I draw from the second Christian Scripture offered by the Lectionary, usually an Epistle (fancy word for a letter) by Paul of Tarsus, the Pharisee and Teacher of Torah but there was something that seemed worth unpacking, particularly when paired against this lovely image from the Hebrew Scripture of the voice of the Holy being heard in the whisper amidst the storm.

*Our battle ultimately is not against human forces, but against kosmokratoras skotos
sovereignities and power and influence of ignorance and obscurity, the evil spirits of the
heavenly realms.*

Translating the Biblical text from Greek to English is never a neutral task as there are always many meanings in any one word or term and which will be emphasized is very often a matter which support the particular ideological perspective one is bringing to the text.

Honest hermeneutics (interpretation) I would argue, is transparent about this, laying its reasoning out rather than appearing self-evident.

So I allowed a Greek Term here to remain in this morning's text...

kosmokratoras skotos

World

Rule

Shadow

It seems to me that if Paul of Tarsus is not in fact setting up a battle of spiritual warfare (as this text is often understood) but a spiritual teaching for seeking faithful resistance to cultural patterns of Empire that this makes sense...

*Our battle ultimately is not against human forces, but against kosmokratoras skotos
sovereignties and power and influence of ignorance and obscurity,*

Ignorance and Obscurity as cultural forces, ideals that pervade with an energy beyond just the individual manifestation in one act or word or another.

Not that literal demons are pulling strings behind CEOs of corporations conniving decision-making, but to recognize that in a given cultural moment, there are shared patterns of thinking that we can name and observe.

Apathy

Lack of Empathy

Economic and Market logic that obscures the worth of human beings and the non-human world into consumer and consumable, producer and producible.

Obscuring our deep interconnectedness behind a shadow of independence.

How do you find faithful response in the midst of this sort of thing, in what we might call *The Belly of the Beast* is what I believe Paul is asking.

<https://geezmagazine.org/magazine/article/dispatch-from-a-dragons-belly>

A few weeks ago, Rev. Mathias offered a powerful opening word

About the soul, as the site of imagination

Where what is possible can be seen.

<https://youtu.be/zTWfmVoLuT8?t=178>

I know about myself that I can fall into a dualistic way of thinking

It's either this or that.

A Quiet Centre or an Inner Critic

And one lives from one or the other.

The issue here of course is that lays a heavy burden on one's self

One's spiritual well-being

And shame is hiding in the wings in such moments

My tendency toward such dualities was pointed out to me as I was transitioning back and sharing some struggles in 'getting my head back in the game'

What if instead of bouncing between these two poles of optimism and despair,

I was challenged to consider,

You saw this as a perichoresis

(the word for circle dance that the Ancient Christians used to describe Trinity.

God as relationship)

<https://knoxmetregina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Sermon-May-30.pdf>

The energy of the movement between attentive wakefulness to one's own pain and struggle, our collective woes as a human (and non-human family) in a time of extreme economic inequality and ecological crisis

To understand this not as a static state in which one is stuck

Out of which one needs to find the quiet centre to dwell instead

But the quiet centre as a space from which one does not escape but finds the space to respond and contribute.

To see dualities of community disagreement which seem a zero sum game, one side wins while the other loses, as instead a place where (to again quote my favourite hymn)

*In the Spirit let us travel,
Open to each other's pain,
Let our loves and fears unravel,
Celebrate the space we gain;*

How often do we view others with whom we are in relationship as entrenched opponents instead of fellow movers in a dance of difference, of deep listening, empathic imagination, and vulnerable sharing?

Might this allow us to hold better stories about each other, and more compassionate stories about ourselves?

Elijah believed that there was a voice of Spirit

Amidst the bluster and noise

So Elijah stayed quiet enough

Held space long enough

To hear it into speech

May we so hold

The bluster and noise

We sense in the other

And hold within ourselves

*There's a place for deepest dreaming,
There's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming
There is always room to spare!*