

Bold Trust in the Lord

Rev. Dr. Scott Ramsey

Psalm 146; Mark 7:24-30
Lewinsville Presbyterian Church
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Today's worship service is an invitation to us to deepen – in our personal and congregational lives – the connections between *contemplation* and *action*, between the contemplative life and the active life. Some people have the mistaken idea that the contemplative life is a way to try and escape from the pressures of the world, to get away. As a result of this mistaken idea, some people scoff at the idea of contemplation as though it were irresponsible. Other people say that it would be nice to be contemplative, but they just don't have time for it, because there are so many things to do. *Today, we are invited to understand that contemplation is actually necessary to provide the roots for our action, and that our action is the fruit of our contemplation.*

For a long time, Lewinsville has had the custom of devoting the worship service on Labor Day weekend to drawing upon aspects of the Taizé style of worship. This is a style of worship that Emily Berman D'Andrea played such a large role in developing here at Lewinsville during her ministry here. Taizé worship comes from a remarkable Christian community in the town of Taizé in the Burgundy region of France. Laura and I had the wonderful opportunity to visit Taizé a number of years ago, perhaps some of you have been there as well. The Taizé community was formed in the 1940s to provide hospitality and service for refugees from World War II. So right from its beginning, Taizé worship has never been a way to escape from the world, but has been deeply connected with serving the pain and the needs of the world – and given the current refugee crisis from Afghanistan, it is a mission with recurring contemporary resonance. Located in western Europe, which has seen the steep decline of the institutional church, especially among young people, the Taizé community has become a pilgrimage destination for young people, where every year, 100,000 young adults from around the world come, over the course of the year, for prayer, Bible study, communal work, and sharing fellowship. There is a global, international character to the community. Something deeply connecting happens in Taizé.

Our two texts for today, from Psalm 146 and Mark 7's story of the encounter between a Syrophenician woman and Jesus, are not your stereotypical contemplative texts. They are not texts of someone sitting quietly on a cushion in the lotus position. They are texts of activity and engagement with the other.

Contemplation. And action. In Mark 7, the Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, challenges Jesus to expand his understanding of his own mission and purpose as being beyond just the people of the Jewish group – a challenge which he receives and

embraces. It's an astonishing encounter between an outsider, a marginalized woman (whose family is suffering great torment from the unclean spirit that has possessed her daughter) and a Jewish male teacher, both of whom are living under the occupying power of the Roman Imperial Machine. For its part, Psalm 146 characterizes the Lord as a vigorously active deity: The Lord *frees* prisoners, the Lord *makes* the blind to see, the Lord *straightens* those who are bent; the Lord *loves* those in right relationship; the Lord *protects* the strangers and the refugees; the Lord *helps* orphans and widows. This is no static, aloof deity.

What we are invited to see, however, is that our own activity and participation in the hurts of the world – participation that we talk about here at Lewinsville as 'loving and serving God by responding to human need' – must be grounded in our ongoing contemplative connection with God. Otherwise, we will end up running around frantically, trying to do too many things, trying to fulfill our own agendas. We must connect ourselves contemplatively with the presence of God, because that will ground everything that we do.

Cultivating the contemplative life of our congregation can be one of our goals, not for the sake of having everyone sit on a cushion, but so that our actions can be grounded, not in our own opinions, but in the heart of God, which will give them a quiet and calm confidence and stability. That is what 'bold trust in the Lord,' the title of this sermon, looks like. Bold trust in the Lord does not come from bravado, or from faking it that we've got bold trust. Bold trust in the Lord comes from the knowledge of God's presence with you.

Spending regular time in silence has traditionally been understood to be essential for anyone wishing to pursue a contemplative life. We may see that practicing silence is an alternative, counter-cultural practice in our society, which tends not to like silence very much, tends to think that silence means something's wrong, because of the anxiety that can surface when we're not keeping ourselves distracted. There is something about silence that makes space inside of us for the awareness of God's presence.

Ordinarily during our monthly Taizé services, we spend 10 minutes in silence. This morning, we're going to have a 3-minute period of silence, following which Jeannette will sing "O Christe Domine Jesu." During this time of silence – which we would invite you to continue later this afternoon, by finding an additional time when you can go for a quiet, meditative walk, or a longer contemplative sit – you may quietly observe your breathing, or you may ask God to speak to you, or you may just be aware of God's presence with you. If it is not too disorienting to you, I would invite you to close your eyes for this time.