

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

When I heard our interim rector, Stephan Mills, focus himself with the line above before every sermon, I vowed I would do the same for my homilies. As I looked at this week's scriptures, it was a thrill to realize that it was part of the Psalm we read today. Read it aloud later today. It will be fun.

I read it, and then I spent a couple of days last week thinking that it said "the meditation of my **mind**," not of my heart. When I realized my error, I wondered why I made that change. There's the cultural association of meditation with mind, and the relationship of mind and speech....

And, a bigger question, is there difference between meditations of the heart and meditations of the mind?

As I thought about it, it was a relief to reckon that there is a difference. A big one. And I was grateful, because I can think some pretty dicey thoughts. If I'm being judged by some of those, I'm not going to be doing too well.

I embrace the saying: "Don't believe everything you think." So many factors can impact what and how we think: weather, too much/too little food or drink, illness and injury. Who we're with. What happened to us recently. What's in the news. Some errant memory giving us a hard time.

Another saying I embrace is "Worry is only praying for what you don't want." Invoking that one has saved me hours of agony as I catch my mind ruminating on some horrible thing happening in the future. I believe practice nipping that behavior in the bud is a great way to honor God.

Meditations of the heart—now---that's where the core stuff is: joy, love, kindness, compassion, communion. That's what God needs to find acceptable. I think those of here can touch that place in ourselves with comfort and gratitude. Our minds may think rotten thoughts on occasion, but our hearts don't.

The lessons today are about teaching and speech. Isaiah: “The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.” James sounds a warning, noting “the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.” It is “placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body...no one can tame the tongue –a restless evil, full of deadly poison” pointing out that “from the same mouth come blessing and cursing.” Talking is a very risky thing.

My initial response in reading Mark is that Jesus was being a bit cranky. Confirming this with Sid, he reminded me that Mark was the first gospel written, and shows Jesus to be a bit as less enthusiastic about his fate than the later gospels portray. He knows his time is near, he’s being recognized as the Messiah and, as usual, the disciples aren’t getting it. As he starts to tell them, teach them, what’s going to happen in the very near future, Peter takes him aside, apparently asking him to cool it with all this talk of death and denial, he’s bumming everybody out. Jesus responds with a vehement “Get behind me Satan!” and then appears curse those that don’t hear him and follow him. He shows his humanity-- that even He loses it on occasion.

Speech. Teaching. Talking. We all do it all the time, sometimes with care, sometimes without. Speech is a product of the mind; therefore what we think is very important if we are to have any chance of taming our tongue.

So what are the stories we tell ourselves? How can we make them better for ourselves, better for others when turned into speech, more closely aligned with the mediations of our heart? For my own sake, I had to divine some tricks, practice some skills to learn how to shut off the ‘dicey’ thought processes and replace them with worthy alternatives.

Not too long ago, I was at the stop light at Main and Quintana, just ragging in my mind about the inefficiency, in my judgement, of that particular light when ---epiphany --I remembered it could be used as an opportunity to center, to chant a mantra, to pray. My personal go-to phrase, adopted from the Dali Lama, and found throughout our liturgy, is “loving kindness”. Said repeatedly,

it is a marvelous way to calm the mind. Now I'm grateful when it's a red light; recognizing it affords me a moment of presence.

I also reframe some situations, embellish, be creative. A while back, I was working in my house, moving stuff around, been at it for hours, I was tired-- and I took a tumble off a short stool and scraped my knee. Bahhh. Mortification, embarrassment, a mental litany of voices shaming me for taking such a risk when I caught that line of thought by the tail, swung it around and decided I'd just tell people, and therefore myself, that I'd slipped while practicing my trapeze act. I mean, why not? That way I generated more laughter than pity, more fun for all. My knee was going to heal no matter what was said, so it might as well have a fun spin to it.

Another trick I use is visualizing a chess board, with all the people around me the pieces in movement on the board. I use this when I realize I've come to some sort of frozen, rigid perception about a situation, stuck judgements, usually combined with resentments. I take a deep breath, and mentally move over some spaces on the board, and a whole new perspective opens up. The situation is seen from a different vantage point and my response to it changes, as does the story I tell myself.

A few times, I've actually had my wits about me enough to use this with others, usually starting to go down a path of crabbiness, catching myself in the nick of time, physically moving over a couple of feet, and telling a totally different, kinder, story about whatever the situation is. Tame that tongue, girlfriend.

There are times, such as these days, when it seems like there is so much to worry about: the mass migration happening from east into Europe, the melting of the ice-caps, human predators and victims, the loss of stately lions, visages of children in need. The above reminder that worrying is praying for what you don't want seems naive and weak. When I become overwhelmed, I turn to the Buddhist practice of tonglen. Borrowing the words of Pema Chodron, "the tonglen practice is a method for connecting to and overcoming fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our heart The core of the practice

is to breathe in another's pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open, and breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness." When I can't shift away from the inordinate sadness I feel about the state of the planet, I take a moment, breathe in the sadness into my heart, transmuting it to comfort, joy and love, and send that out on my breath.

We are all one. Every breath we take has been taken before. The cycle of birth, death, birth repeats itself over and over and over. I do hope we get it as a species, that we don't destroy ourselves and let the cockroaches win. And I really do have hope, in spite of the headlines and the posturing of politicians and petty tyrants all around the world. I accept that change begins with me, so changing the meditations of my mind to be in-line with those of my heart and practicing to tame my tongue is the right thing to do.

In closing, I invite you to close your eyes and visualize one of those images of earth from space that are so awesome and inspiring as I share with you another bit of guidance from the Bible, found in Philippians:

Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.