

Spiritual Practice: Look Up

Inspired by Joy Oladokun's song, "Look Up."

Today I'm going to invite us into a spiritual practice of grounding ourselves in the presence of God... I'm hoping that this spiritual practice can prove to be meaningful for you, **EVEN** when you might feel pretty disconnected from God, or are unsure **how** to connect to God, or when you have tried and have felt nothing of God's presence in response.

The beauty of spiritual practices is that there *are* truly endless ways to encounter God. It's why every Sunday we invite you into a myriad of different practices - ones that are embodied, silent, born from Scripture, born from your breath, emotive, wrestling, visual ... **These practices ARE NOT meant to make you feel like you have to strive hard to be in the presence of God - but they are meant to ease and open up your awareness of God in all places.** Even in the wildest of places. The hardest, most disruptive places - and in seasons, seasons that prove to be **really hard, really loooooong nights.**

*Steve and I within the last couple of weeks (independently of one another) , have come into the presence of a musical artist, her name is Joy Oladokun. You'll get a tiny taste of her voice in Steve's sermon. A sermon that calls us to "Look for God in the Night."

I've of course listened to every song I could find of hers over the last 2 weeks, and she has a song called "Look Up" (that might give you a hunch as to where this spiritual practice is going)... It speaks to this sense of a **long night**, the ongoing reality of how ugly our world can be, and how troubles will continue to be present. Joy, is a black, queer woman and she took the cover photo for this song in the field of an old plantation outside of Nashville. She said that "ahead of her was a gift shop, to the right of her were slave quarters. And as she sat feeling heavy in the graveyard of American failures - her photographer told her to "look up"..."

*Source: *IG: @joyoladokun*

...and in that looking up she in some ways felt more grounded. Opened up to the expanse of life... that includes "freedom above and beauty within"* As well as real struggle.

She gives us - as I believe Jesus does, a way in the night. And this morning I will invite you to Look Up.

"LOOK UP"

I know in many ways it feels counterintuitive to find your grounding - by way of losing sight of the very ground you stand upon. It seems like we are inviting more "unknown," in an already scary place.

But to "look up" - is to match the disruptiveness of darkness...with an equally disruptive posture.

It's one way that we *make way* - not for the thickness of night, or the fear, or the loss, or the struggle to billow in.... But it's where we *make way*- really in vulnerability to an invisible God, as the substance of all things - who promises to be with us.

It's where we realize that *"mystery, paradox, and not-knowing brings to our lives a rich and unexpected grounding."* Richard Rohr

YES all this is potentially true....

AND Looking UP is also **where and how** I just catch my breath these days...with GOD.

Where I find a different view and perspective.... and break the inertia of whatever I've been enmeshed in - and pause and orient as best I can with God.

INVITE

So whether standing or sitting right now,

Gently tilt your head upward...and LOOK UP.

(you can 'Look up' even with your eyes closed - physical cue for your spirit to be attentive - so in your mind's eye you can look for the presence of God).

Make as much room in your upper body as you can ... elongate your rib cage - and open your chest cavity - for full breaths.

Take a few deep breaths - in and out ... inhale and exhale.

Inhale and exhale - this beautiful breath prayer.

Giving yourself to the mystery of God who is as close as your very breath, the sustainer of life.

As you are breathing - think about what you would love God to say to you in these long, hard days of pandemics, - **what do you need God to say to you - for you to know God is with you?**

Think about that - as you keep breathing...

As you keep looking up allow yourself to shed any weight, stress, anxiety for the moment, let gravity do it's work... **why don't you incorporate what you need from God into your breathing:**

1) BREATHE

Inhale - "the thing you need from God"// **The love of God**

Exhale - **"In the darkness"**

If you didn't land on a thing you "need from God" - then just inhale "THE LOVE OF GOD"

Give your attention to a couple of more breaths....

And let that ground you - as much as possible.

*You can slowly return your gaze to its natural position...

2) "SOMEBODY LOVES YOU"

Now one last thing - these long days, these long nights - especially in pandemic - can make us feel totally isolated , alone...

And we miss each other. So I wanted to give us one other way - when you try this "Looking Up" prayer this week to have a picture in your imagination....

A real picture...

A constellation of the love of this community. .. that is still here...

Because the love we have of one another - GROUNDS us....

CHAT IN

What I want you to do is to chat in your “LOVE & LOCATION”

*Switch your chat settings to ‘Panelists & Attendees’ so everyone can see your response.

Simply write - “SENDING LOVE from ...[wherever you are]...”

And be as specific about your location (without giving us your address), as you can.

SO for me, “Sending LOVE from Milton - right down the street from the 7-11.”

****READ out loud all the responses *****

May the love of this community canopy you... be a marker in your mind’s eye of God’s love...

A constant reminder that you are not alone.

And may you recognize this love... even in the dark. Especially in the dark.

Prayer -

Thank you God that your help comes as we lift up our eyes to the mountains.

That you are our God who keeps watch - who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

Protect us God with your thick love, with your weighty presence that gives us pause and hope in these long days.

AMEN.