

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Fifth Sunday after Epiphany – February 8, 2015

Mark 1:29-39

FOR REFLECTION

“Evangelicalism has taken the Extrovert Ideal to its logical extreme...If you don't love Jesus out loud, then it must not be real love. It's not enough to forge your own spiritual connection to the divine; it must be displayed publicly.”

— Susan Cain, Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking

“Introverts Unite Separately In Your Own Homes”

- Tee Shirt

Introverts Unite!

I am convinced that Jesus was an introvert. Not just because I am one – but because of his need for solitude and quiet prayer in order to refuel for his work.

Our text today takes place on the Sabbath – the traditional “day of rest” in Judaism. However, while Jesus was at the synagogue, he was teaching – and in the middle of his teaching he performed an exorcism. He went back to his “safe house” – the home of Simon, his brother, Simon’s wife and mother-in-law – and attempted to rest there. But he immediately needed to perform a healing of Simon’s mother-in-law. Then, when Sabbath restrictions were lifted at sundown, everyone in town brought their relatives and friends suffering from disease or demons – and requested healings and exorcisms. This was no Sabbath for our man Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark is filled with overwhelming crowd scenes to which Jesus must respond. If he were an extravert, Jesus would have been pumped up by this. Extraverts get their energy from other people – from the energy of public places and interactions. But Jesus had to get away from everything in order to restore himself. And this happens more than once – Jesus slipping away to pray and rest – or seeking privacy with just a few people to teach or impart wisdom.

Now I've been told that there is no way that I am an introvert. I believe that is because people in general confuse introvert with "shy and retiring." My Aunt Judi was on the cutting edge of developing personality evaluation tools and used me as a guinea pig for some of her research. So I learned early that personality definitions aren't that simple.

Here, for instance, are some basic definitions that become clear through the Myers-Briggs personality inventory:

Extraversion or Introversion

The first pair of psychological preferences is Extraversion and Introversion. Where do you put your attention and get your energy? Do you like to spend time in the outer world of people and things (Extraversion), or in your inner world of ideas and images (Introversion)?

Extraversion and Introversion as terms used by **Carl G. Jung** explain different attitudes people use to **direct their energy**. These words have a meaning in psychology that is different from the way they are used in everyday language.

Everyone spends some time extraverting and some time introverting. Don't confuse Introversion with shyness or reclusiveness. They are not related.

Take a minute to ask yourself which of the following descriptions seems **more natural, effortless, and comfortable for you?**

Extraversion (E)

I like getting my energy from active involvement in events and having a lot of different activities. I'm excited when I'm around people and I like to energize other people. I like moving into action and making things happen. I generally feel at home in the world. I often understand a problem better when I can talk out loud about it and hear what others have to say.

Introversion (I)

I like getting my energy from dealing with the ideas, pictures, memories, and reactions that are inside my head, in my inner world. I often prefer doing things alone or with one or two people I feel comfortable with. I take time to reflect so that I have a clear idea of

what I'll be doing when I decide to act. Ideas are almost solid things for me. Sometimes I like the idea of something better than the real thing.

Adapted from Looking at Type: The Fundamentals , by Charles R. Martin (CAPT 1997)
<http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/extraversion-or-introversion.htm>

Just so you know, when I get home from church on Sunday I go to bed for several hours. John has charge of Peter so I can nap or zone out or generally refuel. And you KNOW I am not a shy, retiring person. It's just that being with people takes effort for me – I use up my energy in social situations and regain energy when I am alone or with one or two friends.

The story about Jesus going on retreat in the wilderness says “introvert” to me. As he was discerning what kind of Movement to build, what trajectory he was planning to travel, he spent a large chunk of time alone. The story says that he had visitors – but I believe the story teller was describing an internal conversation. I have those all the time. I'm guessing most of us do – some more than others.

Now why does this matter to us? It matters if we are interested in understanding the motivations and personality of the founder of our Movement. It also matters if we are interested in understanding the varieties of spiritual and religious experience that people seek in the world and in this very room.

Adam S. McHugh explains in his book Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture

When introverts go to church, we crave sanctuary in every sense of the word, as we flee from the disorienting distractions of twenty-first-century life. We desire to escape from superficial relationships, trivial communications and the constant noise that pervade our world, and find rest in the probing depths of God's love.

— Adam S. McHugh, Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture

These are the folks among us who actually enjoyed the Quaker service we had last summer – an extended period of silence for reflection. These are the folks who want our silent prayer time to last longer and be uninterrupted. These are the folks who want to quietly listen to the music and be filled with G-d's presence.

The extraverts among us crave the Passing of the Peace, the sharing of joys and concerns, the fellowship time. They tend to be filled with the Spirit of G-d when we are singing “Halle-halle-halle” and, by the way, didn’t enjoy the Quaker service that much.

As our psychological expert says, “Everyone spends some time extraverting and some time introverting.” But most people have a tendency toward one end of the spectrum or the other. This is what determines which “vert” we are and, often, what kind of spirituality we practice or are fulfilled by.

And then, like any form of religion, we have our extremists. Susan Cain, lawyer and negotiation consultant, writes:

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— Susan Cain, Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking

I will add that there was a time when door-to-door invitational evangelism was the big thing in mainline churches. And I dreaded it. You could not have PAID me to go to a stranger’s door and politely invite them to my church. That’s what extraverts are for!!!!

A review of her book Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking explains that:

At least one-third of the people we know are introverts. They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking; who innovate and create but dislike self-promotion; who favor working on their own over working in teams. It is to introverts—Rosa Parks, Chopin, Dr. Seuss, Steve Wozniak—that we owe many of the great contributions to society.

In Quiet, Susan Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so. She charts the rise of the Extrovert Ideal throughout the twentieth century and explores how deeply it has come to permeate our culture. She also introduces us to successful introverts—from a witty, high-octane public speaker who recharges in solitude after his talks, to a record-breaking salesman who quietly taps into the power of questions...

Cain also seeks to find ways for introverts and extroverts to better understand one another--and for introverts to understand their own contradictions, such as the ability to act like extroverts in certain situations.

<http://www.amazon.com/Quiet-Power-Introverts-World-Talking/dp/0307352153#>

Whatever our personality type – whatever our preferences are when it comes to worship and fellowship – all of us benefit from learning about and respecting our differences. Those of us who shape the worship service really do try to take those differences into account – offering times of quiet reflection and then times of noisy community building. You will also find that we miss the mark on occasion – and not everyone will have expectations fulfilled every Sunday. But G-d is at work here – weaving our lives together into a remarkable and beloved community – an open-hearted village of mutual support – working hard to make the world a better place.

If you stay for the Annual Meeting you will find out what an amazing group this is. We are stretching and going beyond previous expectations of what a church can be and do. We are in the process of transforming ourselves and our world – pushing for the kind of radical Culture Shift that Jesus was pushing for. And there are places for Introverts AND Extraverts in this process.

Stay. Listen. Contribute. Be part of the change you wish to see in the world.

And today – you will be rewarded with pizza.

Thanks be to G-d!

Time with Our Young People

Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

"Words stand between silence and silence: between the silence of things and the silence of our own being. Between the silence of the world and the silence of God. When we have really met and known the world in silence, words do not separate us from the world nor from other men, nor from God, nor from ourselves because we no longer trust entirely in language to contain reality."

— Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude

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This excerpt on silence comes from a newly released edition of In the Heart of the World by Mother Teresa. This powerful portrait of one of the most beloved women of all time is told in her own words through a fascinating blend of daily life experiences, prayers, and spiritual wisdom...

There is a very holy priest, who is also one of the best theologians in India right now. I know him very well, and I said to him, "Father, you talk all day about God. How close you must be to God!" And do you know what he said to me? He said, "I may be talking much about God, but I may be talking very little to God." And then he explained, "I may be rattling off so many words and may be saying many good things, but deep down I do not have the time to listen. Because in the silence of the heart, God speaks."

The main difference between introverts and extraverts is the source of their energy. Extraverts get energy from people and objects outside themselves whereas introverts gain energy from within themselves.

- <http://highability.org/the-gifted-introvert/>

Mindful Self-Compassion:

practical tools to improve wellbeing, reduce tension and anxiety, heal relationships, and deal with inner shame and anger.

Our own Rev. Nancy DeNero is proposing to teach her third series of 9 classes in MSC, starting Saturday, February 14, 3:00-5:30 pm, in our Sanctuary, for members and friends of the Mt Hollywood community.

Bring your calendars this Sunday and sign up for the Saturdays you can make (at least seven to realize the program benefits). Or you can email Nancy at nsdenero@mac.com.

- 2/14 Discovering Self-Compassion
- 2/21 Practicing Mindfulness
- 3/7 no meeting
- 3/14 Practicing Loving-Kindness
- 3/21 Discovering Your Compassionate Voice
- 3/28 Living Deeply
- 4/4 Silent Retreat
- 4/11 Managing Difficult Emotions
- 4/18 Transforming Challenging Relationships
- 4/25 Embracing Your Life

No meditation experience is required.

Friends are welcome!

Group size will be 8-14.

Donations accepted.

Blessings, Nancy DeNero
nsdenero@mac.com