

Creating Space for the Sacred — Janice Rider

Good morning! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Janice Rider. I'm the drama director here at St. David's and have had the privilege of working with many children and youth over the years. Some of you know that I have been on an intentional spiritual journey for a long while. I have taken many courses on different topics over this time, but there has been a common thread woven through these classes - the importance of creating spaces and pauses in order to connect with the sacred. Last year, I completed a year-long course on the art of meditation instruction, and this year I have been studying expressive arts therapy. The value of "space" has been emphasized in each course.

When I decided to do a reflection for the church, the topic that kept recurring in my mind was Creating Space for the Sacred. Since Jesus was a master of creating spaces of growth and possibility, I knew I had my theme.

When discussing my theme with Brent, I mentioned a number of Bible passages that were applicable. Brent suggested that not every single one of them needed to be read and that many were memorable enough for people to connect with when they were referenced; therefore, this service is shorter than it otherwise might have been thanks to Brent.

Jesus began his ministry by taking the time to minister to himself in silence, away from all human contact. After his baptism, he went off into the wilderness to prepare a guest house through prayer and fasting. Rumi's poem discusses what a guest house is: a space in which all parts of ourselves are held and embraced, welcomed and entertained. In the wilderness, Jesus entertained his darkest desires and cravings for material wealth, power, and prestige. This was not a comfortable time. Jesus was on a threshold between his past life and what his life might look like going forward depending on which path he chose. He sat with his cravings and desires, and in making space for them, diminished their power. Jesus also entertained his yearning to connect more deeply with God, his eagerness to serve, and his desire to live a purposeful life. He came "face to face" with himself in his entirety. As a result of taking a significant pause in order to get to know himself and find his "quiet centre," Jesus was better prepared to help others and to allow for their human frailties having come to terms with his own frailties.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus continued to allow himself to step away from the busyness of his service when he needed to rejuvenate or connect with God. With three

of his disciples (Peter, James, and John), he went up a mountain to pray. This time was transformative for Jesus and is known as the time of his transfiguration. It ushered in a deeper seeing and knowing and being. As well, this silent, intentional reprieve provided insight as to whom he should select as his apostles. When Jesus grew weary of meeting the needs of others, as he did after feeding the five thousand, he went out onto the water to replenish his soul on the bosom of the waves, allowing himself to be rocked, nurtured, and refreshed. Jesus made space in his life for celebration, as he did when he went to the wedding in Canaan, and for grieving, as he did in the Garden of Gethsemane. In short, Jesus was present to his own inner world.

It is imperative that we take the time to be present, without judgement, to our own inner worlds, our ups and our downs, “opening to the life we have refused again and again until now, “ to quote David Whyte. By being present and open to whatever we are experiencing, we generate compassion and love towards ourselves. Carl Rogers writes, “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.” I would add that self compassion allows us to be compassionate and tender in relation to others.

Francis Weller writes in his book *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, that “psychological moralism” puts pressure on us to “always be improving, feeling good, and rising above our problems.” There is not a lot of stomach in our society for grief, anger, shame, and sadness. People suppress these feelings by distracting themselves with music, work, television, good books, friends, exercise, drugs, and alcohol. This does not get rid of uncomfortable feelings, it only suppresses them. If, like Jesus, we become an empty container for our longings and emotions, embracing them as one would a child, they will transform in the light of our own love. The movie *Rocketman* follows the life of Elton John. At the end of the movie, Elton John gives himself the love he needs to move forward by hugging the child he had once been, the child who felt so alone, unseen, and unheard. We need to follow this example.

During Jesus’ life, he also made space for people, not just friends and family, but people from all walks of life, including tax collectors and prostitutes. When he visited a certain village, Jesus was invited to Martha and Mary’s home following the death of their brother, Lazarus. He made himself available during a time of mourning. Martha was eager to see to Jesus’ comfort. She wanted everything to be just right for her special guest; consequently, she bustled and fussed. Her sister, Mary, was not troubled by thoughts of getting everything ready and right; she simply made space in her heart and

home for Jesus and leaned in to listen to his words during a time of great sadness. Martha was annoyed - why wasn't her sister aiding and abetting her efforts? Jesus assured her that Mary had the equation right. Space plus time equals connection and growth.

We are often so busy with a multitude of tasks that we are only just keeping our heads above water. As a result, we miss out on opportunities to connect with the important people in our lives. My Auntie Virginia was accomplished in the art of making space in her home. In truth, her home always looked like the wind had been playing in it for days on end and that really isn't an exaggeration; nonetheless, she was consistently warm and welcoming. The important thing wasn't the appearance of her house, it was making sure that anyone who stopped on her doorstep was invited inside. Whenever I feel that my house is not presentable enough for company, I think about my aunt. Jesus took the time to visit with children as well as adults. When his disciples tried to send parents with children away, believing that Jesus was too busy to have the time to spend with them, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Jesus recognized children's ability to inhabit the present utterly and completely, their utter surrender to each and every moment. It is this open state of being that lets the Kingdom of God in. Children also play and, in the creative space of play, know abundance.

Recently, 215 children were discovered buried near a Kamloops residential school. We need time to process the grief and rage that has been unleashed in the wake of this discovery. An opening is needed to process our own feelings and to allow indigenous neighbours to process their feelings. As well, we need to make time to check out other residential school sites in order to open up the doors for the mourning of other children lost to residential school atrocities. If there are ways we can come together with indigenous people to be present to their grief, this may move us all into the liminal space of healing.

Jesus was playful in the way he approached teaching. He revelled in parables and often expressed ideas through stories so that they would resonate with people. The Kingdom of Heaven featured largely in a number of parables, including one about a pearl. In this parable, a wealthy merchant was seeking valuable pearls and happened upon one of "great price." Immediately, he "went and sold all that he had and bought it." This was an act of clearing out the clutter to make room for the most important thing - the Kingdom.

In our society, we cling to a lot of stuff. It's hard to find the Kingdom amongst the clutter. We have so many things that we often live our lives around reorganizing, cleaning, and sorting. In the book *Goodbye, Things: The New Japanese Minimalism* by Fumio Sasaki, Fumio discusses how his life changed when he decided to live with less. He had far more time and energy for friends and activities. His consumption of resources dwindled significantly. Things became simpler; for instance, looking after his apartment became easy. If we intentionally create more spaces in our lives by accumulating less, we will leave more room for other living things on this planet and more resources for them; also, we will have more time for the best things in life. Less truly is more.

So, plan to make more space in your life for the Sacred. Step away from busyness and sit with yourself as a friend. Be the kind of friend who doesn't judge, offer advice, or try to "fix" things. Just be there. Be there for yourself when you're sad, when you're happy, when you're angry, when you're content, when you're afraid, and when joy bubbles up inside you. Hold space for yourself with compassion and love.

Embrace your inner child, your wounds. And, yes, this is an act of courage. It is not always comfortable. As well, make space for others in your life, and be there for them as you would have them be there for you, but be gentle with yourself when you don't always meet the mark. Being truly present to others is also an act of courage. It can prove uncomfortable. As well, leave space for other living things by embracing simplicity; in the end, we are connected to all creation. There is no "us" and "them." There is only "us." And, finally, remember to create space for what is most needed - the Kingdom, the Ultimate Mystery. Look for the Kingdom in all that you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Honour the Kingdom by being present to awe and wonder. And, please, do take time to play.