

**Water from an Ancient Well: The Divine Presence in Solitude**  
**Isaiah 30:15**  
**Sunday, July 12, 2026**

In our current sermon series drawing from Kenneth McIntosh's "Water from an Ancient Well," we have discussed loving Christ with our whole selves. We have learned that we love a God who is everywhere and in whom we have our being. We learned that we have to practice through prayer, maintaining our connection to the divine. We learned that to make God our vision, we have to seek the Divine Presence, learning to see the Divine Presence in the everyday and to see our lives through God's vision. We actually have this enshrined in our church mission statement, "Our mission is to continue the journey of seeking, serving, and sharing God's love." Seek, Serve, and Share. During this sermon series and other sermons by Pastor Tommy, we have explored ways to seek God's love, such as through prayer, Scripture study, worship, and service. We can do these things both within and outside the church, since we know that the divine is everywhere. Yet, the Celtic Christian tradition, along with many others, including our own Methodist tradition, tells us there is another place we can seek the presence of God. That is within ourselves, in our very hearts and minds, in the deep silence of our own spirit.

We see examples of this throughout Scripture. In Genesis 24:63, Isaac "went out to meditate in the field in the evening." Moses went up onto the mountain alone with God. Elijah also heard the whisper of God's voice in a cave on a mountain. In his preparation for ministry, Jesus retreated to the desert alone for 40 days to seek God. Paul emulated this pattern as well after the Damascus Road experience as he sought to know the direction his life would now take.

The tradition of withdrawing to quiet and remote locations has continued throughout Christian history. An especially powerful movement was the Near Eastern Christians known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. These Christians withdrew from the urban Christian life associated with the growing institutional church, which was increasingly growing close to the dying Roman empire, to the desert, where they could seek God both alone and in scattered monasteries. The Celtic Christians read these stories of the desert Christians and sought their own sort of desert: places on the edge of civilization, in caves and islands scattered throughout the British Isles. They sought in these places the wild and unpredictable movement of God's spirit so that they could directly experience the presence of God's love, in what theologians would call a "mystical" experience.

"Mystic" is not a word to be afraid of. It does not mean something esoteric or extreme. It is naming what many of us have already experienced: God's presence in our lives in a direct, personal way. That's it! In my experience, I have found very few people who have not had at least one encounter with the Divine Presence. Maybe God's presence was felt under the night sky, looking up at the stars. Perhaps it was felt in the bread and juice of Communion. Perhaps in moments of deep sorrow, when you knew that God was manifesting sustaining presence in your life, when you knew you were loved and held by the divine and it was going to be alright, despite all evidence to the contrary. Perhaps it was sitting in a church, hearing Scripture read, and feeling that one's "heart was strangely warmed," as John Wesley experienced.

A couple of caveats are in order. First, none of this happens without the grace and power of God. We are broken people, and we need the grace and power of God, as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, to restore the divine image within us, enabling us to

participate in the work of God's grace. Second, personal experiences of God's presence, while powerful and necessary, should be interpreted and lived out within the community of faith and tested against the revelation of Scripture, tradition, and reason. Now, back to the show...

I believe that we can benefit from moments of peace and solitude, like those of the Desert and Celtic Christians, even in the modern, fast-paced life of 2026. Our passage today tells us that "in repentance and rest is your salvation, and in quietness and trust is your strength." This is no less true today than it was when Isaiah wrote these words.

Of what do we need to repent today? I can only speak for myself, but maybe this resonates with you. I need to repent of believing that my worth is my productivity, rather than my belovedness as God's child. I need to repent of the belief that I can do it all without acknowledging that I am made to rest by my Creator, who also rested. I need to repent of when I have denied others the right to rest through my selfishness. I need to repent of believing that times of rest are a "waste of time." I believe that repenting of these things will greatly help me move forward in embracing the love and presence God has for me in silence and solitude.

Practicing periods of true rest, with silence and solitude, is both very difficult and very easy. It is difficult because most of us live very noisy lives. We live with other humans, who make claims on our time and attention. We have a portal to the outside world in our pockets, constantly notifying us of what we are missing. We have a long list of to-dos each day that is constantly tugging at our minds. We are afraid of making space for silence because we are afraid of our thoughts about ourselves. We are afraid that if we are not striving for something productive or meaningful, we are nothing. Finding time away for silence and solitude will take work.

Seeking the presence of God in silence and solitude is also very easy, because all that God asks of us in those times is to "be still and know" God. There is no pressure of performing, no expectation that we will "get it right." Just be still and trust. I have heard that seeking God in silence is like a child resting in its mother's or father's lap, its head resting softly on its parent, with a deep sense of love and security. My teacher at Perkins, Dr. Ruben Habito, would open every class period with five minutes of what he called "being time." We could close our eyes, calm our breath, and simply be with each other and with the presence of God with us. I also observed Dr. Habito practicing this type of prayer at other times where there were lulls in his activity, you know, the types of time that we reach for our phones to fill the void. (There has been debate over whether Dr. Habito may have been sleeping during "being time." I find the debate moot because even if he was sleeping, he was resisting the urge to be productive or to fill his mind with more content. He was at peace!) As we talked about with prayer last week, we can incorporate times of silence and solitude into our days in small ways, either in our prayer times or at other times. Start with five minutes a day and work your way into more.

The American Trappist monk Thomas Merton had this to say about cultivating silence and solitude. "Keep your eyes clean and your ears quiet and your mind serene. Breathe God's air. Work, if you can, under His sky. But if you have to live in a city and work among machines and ride in the subways and eat in a place where the radio make you deaf with spurious news and where the food destroys your life and the sentiments of those around you poison your heart with boredom, do not be impatient, but accept it as the love of God and as a seed of solitude planted in your soul. If you are appalled by those things, you will keep your appetite for the healing silence... but meanwhile--keep your sense of compassion for the men who have

forgotten the very concept of solitude. You, at least, know that it exists and that is the source of peace and joy. You can still hope for such joy. They do not even hope for it anymore."

May we seek the deep rest found in the silence and solitude with God. May we never forget our need for it. May we never forget the depth of love God offers us all. Amen.