

JourneyMates

Prayerful Attentiveness October 2014 Nancy Rich, Edenton JourneyMates

At a wedding in August 2014 at Umstead Hotel I took a long walk with my husband Cy throughout the SAS campus and the banners lining both sides of the street caught my attention:

KNOW MORE!
KNOW FAST!
KNOW NOW!
POWER IS TO KNOW!!

It's an accurate picture of the culture we live in, a culture that is addicted to MORE, NOW AND FAST...WHATEVER OUR ADDICTION OF CHOICE MAY BE.

For a software company the mantra is more knowledge...quicker...now. Knowledge equals power...and it may make sense for that culture

But what fills the screen of your mind, of mine? What captures your attention most of the time? What does our culture look like as Christ followers? What is the lens through which we look at life?

Even our Christian culture sometimes unwittingly pushes us towards more...more study and knowledge, more service, more responsibility in the church, more confession in our battle against the sin in our lives...and as we work harder and run faster, until we come to the place where we ask:

"Where is God in all this? Where is this Jesus that I first knew and fell in love with?"

The good news is that He loves to answer this cry...and if we are attentive to our own heart and to Him, His love will begin to capture our attention. "The familiar leader/Jesus will become more and more the beckoning, mysterious Captivator of our hearts." (Ashbrook, *Mansions of the Heart* 170). Jesus and his love SLOWLY become the treasure in the field, the pearl of great price for which we are longing and as the parable tells us, we will sell all to buy this treasure! We can experience a new longing for deeper intimacy with the Lord and a new grace to "see" and "feel" God in prayer and in life. These experiences shift our attention more toward the Giver than the gifts. (110)

I imagine that we are all, in varying degrees, seeking this deeper intimacy with God through Christ...it is what draws us together in JourneyMates as we experience the time and space to encounter God. We want to know Him as someone we love and want to spend time with, to abide in Him and behold Him in the silence, and in one another as we listen to our stories and encourage each other back to Christ, to His presence, to His love. We call JM a "contemplative"

group...what does that mean?? "Christian contemplation is the term we use for our attentiveness and focus on God alone." (115) We are called to be still and listen, to just be still and know... a knowing that in Hebrew language is used for a man knowing his wife...intimately. This attentive stillness becomes a new way of praying...we turn our attention to God, and simply behold Him, abide in Him, often without words filling every space.

But this can be a struggle as we begin this type of prayer and are called beyond just the "doing" in our relationship with God into the "being" of relationship with Him. Even our requests and intercessions in this contemplative praying can take on a new form as we bring the person we care about to our mind, and simply hold them silently in God's power and love, trusting in Him. As we practice this type of prayer, our mind finds it almost impossible to be simply still and focus on God...*know more...know fast...know now...*The mind is like an undisciplined child who can't stop talking or running around. (116). We have to learn to become still...to slow down...to focus and be attentive to God, letting distractions pass by.

The apostle Paul was clearly an accomplished scholar, churchman, a citizen of Rome with community responsibilities - a "doer" par excellence! But listen to his heart as he walked closer and closer to Christ. Instead of wanting **more** accomplishments, **more** knowledge, **more** power, he writes this to the Church at Philippi:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted **loss** for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be **loss** in view of the surpassing value of KNOWING Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the **loss** of all things, and count them but rubbish that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may KNOW HIM (experience intimately) and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to his death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection of the dead. (3:7-11).

We hear Paul choosing less... loss of...surrender of.... the things that were gain to him in the world's culture in view of the SURPASSING value of knowing Christ.

As we learn from the psalmist's personal experience of God, God's attention is always toward us from before we were knit together in our mother's womb, until the number of our days, known intimately by him, are finished. He takes initiative with us. God has profoundly touched David with His love and His presence and David cries out in response to this intimate knowing, "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! (139)

Pause for a moment of contemplation and prayer:

How does this intimate knowing, this deep touch of love, make you feel?

How do you express your desire for God to Him in this moment?

May we grow in desire to return this intimate gaze to our Lord, to give Him our full attention, to learn to be still and to receive His love...and to love Him in return. AMEN