

Earth, Dirt, Gardens: Finding God in the Extraordinary Ordinary ***Exploring the Outdoor Cathedral of Prayer***

Ken Wilson 7.14.19

I grew up with a very limited experience of people around me praying. Same true of **exercise**. Kids played, ran around, but I don't remember seeing adults exercise. I didn't think of exercise or praying as coping mechanism—things you do to help you get through the day, deal with life, feel better.

Praying was a **specialty** activity. Special occasion "Say Grace." Long involved prayers mostly by a minister at church with a special vocabulary and syntax [therefore angels and archangels and all the company of heaven ...] I guess I learned it was something you were supposed to before going to bed.

First time I witnessed someone pray in a non-specialty way, in a relaxed, familiar way, shocking. [Brian giving thanks]

The one thing I didn't think of as normal or desirable was praying **outside**. Play outside, yes. Go outside to get to another inside space like school, yes. But you would never go outside to pray: e: Going for a walk and pray. Sit in a park praying ... or pray while watching sun rise or set Outside my realm of the desirable, doable.

One of the gifts of the Jewish people to the world is interpreting **nature**—the outdoor world—as a **temple**. [Emily's video series]

If the earth is a temple, then the feelings you could get outside, be attentive to, are like feelings you might get in a gorgeous cathedral—high vaulted ceilings, stained glass ...

Today, want to stimulate desire to pray outside by taking a quick tour of Jesus praying outside. So while Jesus, an observant Jew, didn't neglect worship with his community in synagogue ... most of his personal praying happened outdoors.

First occurrence is an intense one. He's standing in a river praying when "***The Spirit alighted on him like a dove***" then a voice: "***You're my son In whom I delight***" [Setting fit experience]

Immersed, enveloped in water. Feels the Spirit come down on him like dove. Then a voice gave him the feeling of being a loved child.

[A son in whom I delight ... feeling a small child might have]

You know how you feel small in the best possible way when you are standing beneath a wide open sky in Milan, or on the beach of Lake Michigan, or away from the light pollution and the moon isn't bright and you see the stars like Abraham did? I think that's the feeling Jesus had. Seminal moment for him ... happened outside/

In Mark's gospel the first time we see Jesus praying: ***"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed."*** (Mk. 1:35)

Isn't there a poetic feel and appeal to that sentence? [Repeat]

Jesus seemed to have a go-to place for praying: **wilderness.**

Same chapter, Mark, 1 earlier: ***"Immediately the Spirit impelled him to go out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days ... and he was with the wild beasts ..."*** (Mark. 1: 12-13)

Luke adds this detail: ***"Jesus would often slip away to the wilderness and pray"***

In this region the wilderness was what we would call desert. Had never been out in the desert ... went to Phoenix to visit James R ... let's go hike in the desert ... a stark beauty ... more going on

Whatever praying you'd do in a space like this you would do with your **eyes open**, alert to surroundings (normal Jewish way to pray)

Also examples of Jesus going up a mountainside to pray. Here's one: ***"Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while***

he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on the mountainside to pray” (Mk. 6:45-46)

Jesus the introvert: enough people! Emily/me commiserating. Rachel’s family cabin, 40 people. Me at family reunion 14. Sometimes you just want to send everyone away just like Jesus did. He made disciples get in a boat and leave him alone. He dismissed crowd, went up the mountainside to pray. Alone.

Elevations shifts change our perspective:

Rob Clark story in Bournemouth

Fortunately, lots of urban settings have little nature preserves.

Manhattan has Central Park. A2 has Arb. Ypsi has Frog Island.

Jesus used one of these places for praying when he was in city.

On night before his death, after dinner he went to **Mount of Olives**. I’m sure Emily’s been there. I’m going in November.

Describe: Mountain ridge East of Old City ... beyond it desert. Overlooking valley, then city rising.

At base of Mount of Olives is garden called **Gethsemane** or **“olive press.”** Jesus had an agonizing prayer experience there where his body felt the pressure he was under. (Not all praying is calming or pleasant. Sometimes it’s bringing our pain to God which means feeling it more intensely.) So the **setting isn’t incidental**.

Under a big open sky we feel small. IN a garden called “olive press” we might feel like olives in a press, having the oil squeezed out.

Wrap this up:

Suggest we try a perspective shift—from thinking of the outdoors as a space we hurry through on our way to somewhere else to nudging our brains to regard the outdoors as a cathedral.

What if we nudged ourselves to regard the outdoors as a cathedral? How we regard something affects our experience.

Thinking of the outdoors as a cathedral could improve our experience of outdoors. Foster different feelings ... awe.

Ps. 19: 1-7 is doing this (Robert Alter) Comment

We need an active nudge in this direction (seeing outdoors a cathedral) because **our minds can get dulled** to the outdoors.

How? They say, Indoor spaces are boring, not enough going on to keep our attention. So our stimulation-starved brains are drawn to screens with more going on—more movement, more color ... but it's a little it like crack cocaine, it's so much stimulation that it's addictive. We need more and more to get the same effect.

I notice myself under-stimulated by long periods indoors, and over-stimulated by screen time with fast moving images and brighter-than-life colors ... when I do go outside in that mode,

I can be a little dull and inattentive to the calming effect of the outdoors. Right?

Ever feel like a kid in the backseat on family vacation driving through Yosemite, with their heads glued to the movie on the smartphone while the parents are going, look!

If you've ever been in a cathedral and that expansive-awe feeling just standing or sitting in there, that's the feeling to be alert to

Suggest a prayer exercise to try to increase our attentiveness to outdoors. 5 Day silent retreat. We were all terrified. Retreat leader gave us an exercise.

40 Minute walk: 10 minutes focus on sights; 10 minutes focus on the sounds; 10 minutes focus on sense of touch; 10 minutes focus on smells.

One more: Praying Jesus Prayer outdoors (The Way of the Pilgrim)

QUIET REFLECTION

We catch desire from seeing others desire something.

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Very early in the morning

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark

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