



The Temptation in the Wilderness, Briton Riviere, 1898.

Greetings!

Please read [Luke Chapter 5](#)

Spiritual strength and self-care are important issues in these days. The well-known church futurist and leader, [Carey Nieuwhof](#), spoke of his own sense of swings in effectiveness, passion for the ministry and seasons of burnout this week in Bishop Palmer's Leadership Clinic. He offered some tips that helped him through those rough times. As he spoke I was reminded of chapter 5 in the Gospel of Luke. As a pastor in a local church, Nieuwhof was running a ministry and did a great deal of recruitment. He created systems for the care and nurture of people spiritually and especially in their relationship with Jesus. In this chapter of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches about searching out the deeper places in our lives and taking care of ourselves on the inside so we can be engaged in the world where we are needed. Luke 5:16 reports that Jesus took care of his soul in order to care for others by withdrawing to deserted places for prayer.

Nieuwhof gave voice to that kind of care and preparation for his listeners in the webinar. I want to pick up on that theme. We all know that we are living in difficult times. We are still in the throes of two pandemics that are consuming us culturally and emotionally. The Covid-19 pandemic has its daily health warnings and politicized commentary on everything from "Is it real?" to "It is just like the Flu" and from "vaxers" to "never vaxers" and virtually everything in between. The rapid launching pad to innovation that was required and is constantly being refined from leaders in every walk of life is exhausting. The economic toll that has been disproportionately taken on by the poor, persons of color and non-homeowners is tremendous.

Displacement of persons culturally will be the subject of many research papers

well into the future regarding this pandemic. Recently, I was listening to a radio broadcast about the impact of 9-10 hours of Zoom and other forms of video conferencing on the human eye. In addition, they talked about the impact of seeing your image on the Zoom mirror. The sum total – stress.

And while all the pieces relative to the Covid-19 pandemic have been going on, the United States is dealing with the pandemic of racism. Research papers have been written for years regarding the social impact, the psychological impact and the generational toll that this pandemic has taken on multiple generations of persons over a 400-year period of North American history. Cultural competency continues to be a growing edge that ranges from denial, to polarization to minimization. Our cultural and racial reckoning is painful. The pain and stress that people are experiencing identifies that people are in differing places of readiness to do the hard work that is needed.

The trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis has attracted national and international attention. This and continuing incidences including last week's police shooting in Minnesota and the death of another young African American man, Daunte Wright, has people on edge. People from differing racial groups use opposing cultural and systemic lenses exacerbating cultural denial, polarization and minimization as truth rather than stages towards acceptance and adaptability in another's culture. To understand another means taking the time to listen. Listening and then embracing, hearing of both the formal and informal systemic and personal struggles with racism, is hard work and emotionally draining. However true that may be, White European North American culture does not get a pass on doing the hard work and confessing the sin of racism. Continuing to deny or minimize continues the victimization. Do we have the courage to reform ourselves – our institutions – our laws – our country?

We can learn to work and live our lives together. We can flourish together culturally but it is going to take intentional work. I am learning all the time how easy it is to misspeak or not fully understand another. I am so blessed to be surrounded by people who care for me and will tell me when I am not sensitive. But the first hard thing I had to do was to become vulnerable enough to know I needed to grow. It is hard, but you can learn too. And there is one more thing, in the midst of this no one who is culturally different than me has ever asked me to give up who I am. What I have been asked to do is simply include others.

Part of the work of mending wounds requires finding pathways towards healing. That pathway needs a language and some models for being. In the Christian tradition, we have ample resources offering appropriate language and behaviors to help us deal with the divides over Covid 19 and the Pandemic of Racism. In fact, Jesus Christ gave us most of them! I refer you back to Luke 5. Take care of your soul! Search for the depths of the spiritual life. Listen to others. If your soul is empty you will not be able to gain traction overcoming either pandemic. If you look at the life of Jesus you will see that his spiritual preparation was prayer, mostly alone time with God. Look in the Gospels at Jesus – Prayer – Healing – Prayer – Call for Social Justice – Prayer – Confrontation of the political power brokers of the – Scribes – Pharisees – Priests.

So, I encourage you in your hard personal and corporate work for social justice to care for your soul. I encourage you in your care for others to care for your soul. Ponder Riviere's painting and find yourself on a soul filling retreat with God. Read and meditate on these texts and poems and care for your soul:

- [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#), Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- [Caged Bird](#), Maya Angelou
- [Psalm 51](#), NRSV
- [Help Us Accept Each Other](#), UMH 560

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

