

March 3, 2024

In This Way...Center

Pastor Paul Dean

I called it stupid Tuesday. It wasn't Tuesday's fault. It was our fault, it just happened to all happen on Tuesdays. So stupid Tuesday. Here is how it worked. I'd make it home to pick up my son and daughter and then I'd drive them over to Prior Lake for piano lessons. Wonderful stuff. Amazing experience. I'd drop my son off first and then my daughter and I would drive to the local subway and pick up two sandwiches. One for my son because right after his piano lesson, after dropping off my daughter for her piano lesson, I would drive him to Eden Prairie for soccer training. Then drive back to Prior Lake to pick up my daughter and then drive her to Rosemount for her soccer training. Then drive back to Eden Prairie and pick up my son to bring him home to Burnsville where we live. Occasionally, depending on the day, I then would go back to Rosemount to pick up my daughter and bring her home. Now... all of this happened on Tuesdays.

I can still remember the day I named Tuesday, stupid Tuesday. I found myself on one of those Tuesdays, while on my way to Rosemount with my daughter, gripping the steering wheel with, well, let's say, an unusual aggressiveness. I remember coming home that night and talking with my wife and basically saying a couple of things. The first is that we have to stop. No more stupid Tuesdays. And the second is we have to find a different center – a different place where we find value not only for our kids but for ourselves. A different center where we live in a lot more freedom while giving our kids opportunities to experience all kinds of things. Yes, we were going to be busy with life. Get it... understand it but our business cannot be our center. We have to find the time to simply be and not do. A center where we can collect our thoughts. A center that gives us space to look ahead far enough so we don't just move stupid from Tuesdays to Thursdays. A center that not only held us as human beings, that held us in our covenant of marriage but also was an example and a model for our kids. And date night was born. A carved-out time where we could just be with one another and that centering practice is one of our

most, if not the most, sacred times we have together. And we protect it.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus had some stupid Tuesdays as well. But he developed a different sacred practice that centered him for the ministry he was called to do.

But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds were gathering together to hear him and to be healed of their illnesses. Yet Jesus himself frequently withdrew to the wilderness and prayed. Luke 5:15-16

Jesus spends lots of time away from people, in wilderness areas or places where he can be alone, usually right after large healing or teaching events, or right before. Jesus takes time to center his spirit so that he can truly be present with those who need him to be present.

In my time walking this earth I have found this type of behavior to be the hardest thing for many of us human beings to do. To shut down a bit, to find a center. Many of us are living stupid Tuesdays every single day. Just to make it here today may be a heavy lift. You may have been gripping the steering wheel a bit harder today. Odds are that many of us, while physically present, are mentally, maybe even spiritually somewhere else. Many of us are in desperate need of a date night with God. A carved-out time where you could just be with God. And protect it.

I happen to believe that this form of prayer, centering prayer, is so important for us that we are going to take a couple of minutes centering ourselves through prayer this morning. Now there are lots of ways to pray and the centering prayer practice is not going to be for everyone. At least not at first. It wasn't for me and while at times it is incredibly helpful, other times I find it a bit annoying. So don't get bent out of shape. Also, we will have some light music playing in the background for a couple of reasons. It will help your mind focus because while the room will be quiet, it will be far from silent. Folks will be making noises. Children may jump in with a thing or two to say as well. Moms and dads, it's ok if your kiddos make some noises.

This morning we will use a practice that I use to center myself. It's a modified version of The Daily Examen. I have changed some of the flow and

questions, but the point of centering prayer isn't in doing it any certain way. It's to find a way for you go on a date with God and God is ready. You can keep your eyes open. You can close your eyes. You can find any body posture that works for you.

I will lead you in this through some prompts, but the prompts will still be on the screen because your mind will wander – and that is ok.

Become aware of God's presence.

Review your day with gratitude.

Look toward the rest of your day with these questions.

- What worries you about the rest of the day?
 - Hold that tight in your fist – and then let it go remembering that God is present with you.
- What are you looking forward to?
 - Breathe that in celebrating that God is present with you.

In this way, may God through our prayers, center us so that we can be present too.