



The pervasive element in our two-thousand-year pastoral tradition is not someone who “gets things done” but rather the person placed in the community to pay attention and call attention to “what is going on right now” between men and women, with one another and with God—this kingdom of God that is primarily local, relentlessly personal, and prayerful “without ceasing.”

—Eugene Peterson, *The Pastor*

# Discerning the Peaceful One, Here

By Katie Harmon-McLaughlin, *Spiritual Formation Ministries*

My life in ministry has been a constant call to grow in attention. As I have companioned people and communities over the years, I increasingly have become convinced there is never “nothing happening.” The discernment mantra, God in all things, is a true and reliable guide. The power of this wisdom is that it is both universal and particular.

God in all things can be applied to the whole cosmos, to what is vast and unfathomable, to the places and people we never will encounter. Yet, it is also here, exactly where we are and how we are that God is at work, that Jesus, the peaceful One is seeking to be embodied. This year, we invite you to join us as we focus on the here of wherever we are. We want to be open and get specific. We want to see the whole landscape and sift through the details that otherwise might go unnoticed in our hurried lives.

Seeking God in this way, whether as a process or a posture, is an act of discernment. This is the journey to which we are called as we embrace our discipleship in this fluid, complex moment in our history. The question we have been asking—“Are we moving toward Jesus the peaceful One?”—is meant to guide the church as a global family, but it also is stunningly precise as it points directly to our local contexts. Anywhere we are, we can be moving closer to Jesus, the peaceful One, who seeks to become incarnate in every moment and place. When this awareness moves from head to heart and becomes a way of seeing the world, the abstract becomes clearer. Right here, where and as you are, is where your faith demands to be lived.

When this belief moves from our head to our heart and becomes a way of seeing the world, suddenly what was abstract becomes clearer. Clarity does not mean ease, but it does make our faith more real, relevant, costly, consequential, more personally and communally transformative.

This is the kind of vibrant, vital discipleship our world hungers for. It is the kind of journey to substantive relationship with God that our own souls crave. It is naturally life-giving, energizing, hope-filled even in difficult times because it grows our capacity for seeing the abundance of the Spirit here, where we are.

From the substance of ordinary places, people, and elements—mud and spit on the blind man’s eyes, a conversation at the well, dinner at the table of a tax collector—Jesus continually demonstrated how the kin-dom of God is not far off but has come near. This way of seeing is a powerful integrative force in our lives because it reveals that nothing is outside the scope of God’s presence and activity. It includes what is most deeply personal that has never been named aloud and what is unimaginable to us that is reality for someone else.

The promise and possibility of God’s kin-dom is already among us, in the details, the relationships, the encounters of our ordinary lives. Our faith is inviting us to precision and particularity as we embrace the all-encompassing, inclusive presence of Jesus, the peaceful One inviting us closer exactly where we are.

