

A Contemplative Service
featuring
Bach's Six Suites for Unaccompanied Cello

Grace Church Brooklyn Heights
February 19, 2012



Tonight Bach's Suite No. 1 in G major will be performed by Jennifer DeVore. The movements of the suite will alternate with prayers, brief scriptural readings and a twenty minute period of silence.

Lectio divina is a traditional way of listening to scripture with the ear of the heart, beyond intellectual thought. Lectio divina readings are traditionally read more than once, alternating with periods of silence, to allow them to sink more deeply into the heart. Tonight we will hear one of Jesus's wisdom teachings read twice. As you allow the passage to resonate within you, you may find that you are no longer thinking about the passage, but rather resting in it in a contemplative way.

You might think of the music itself as a kind of audio divina, listened to with the ear of the heart. Unlike much of Bach's other music, the cello suites may not have been written with a religious setting in mind and yet we may hear God speaking to us through them or simply rest in God's presence as we listen to them.

After the fourth movement of the Suite we will sit in silence for 20 minutes. You are welcome to simply sit quietly or pray or meditate in your own way. If you would like to engage in the practice of centering prayer, a simple method of contemplative prayer in which we rest silently in the presence of God, some guidelines are provided in this program.

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Bach Suite No. 1 in G major

1. Prelude

PSALM 4

Even in the midst of great pain, Lord,
I praise you for that which is.
I will not refuse this grief
or close myself to this anguish.
Let shallow men pray for ease:
“Comfort us; shield us from sorrow.”
I pray for whatever you send me,
and I ask to receive it as your gift.
You have put a joy in my heart
greater than all the world’s riches.
I lie down trusting the darkness,
for I know that even now you are here.

Adaptation from Stephen Mitchell, A Book of Psalms

SILENCE

2. Allemande

FIRST READING

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

(Matthew 13: 31-32, *NRSV* translation)

SILENCE

3. Courante

SECOND READING

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

(Matthew 13: 31-32, NRSV translation)

SILENCE

4. Sarabande

20 MINUTE PERIOD OF SILENCE

We will sit in silence for 20 minutes. You are welcome to simply sit quietly or pray or meditate in your own way. If you would like to engage in the practice of centering prayer, a simple method of contemplative prayer in which we rest silently in the presence of God, some guidelines are provided below.

CENTERING PRAYER GUIDELINES

- *Choose a sacred word of one or two syllables as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you. Examples of a sacred word: Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust, Holy, Glory, God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. You can also use your breath as a sacred symbol.*
- *Sit comfortably with your back straight and your eyes closed. Silently, to yourself, introduce the sacred word or breath as the symbol of your consent to God's presence. When you are ready, you can let go of the sacred symbol and simply rest in God.*
- *When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word or breath. Thoughts are a natural part of the process, constantly arising, but when they become a distraction, the sacred symbol is always available to help you gently orient yourself towards God.*

5. Menuett

PRAYER

*Lord,
it is night.*

*The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of God.*

*It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done
what has not been done has not been done;
let it be.*

*The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in you.*

*The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.*

*The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.*

*In your name we pray.
Amen.*

A New Zealand Prayer Book

6. Gigue

DEPART IN SILENCE. GO IN PEACE.

These services are a special Lenten version of the regular centering prayer group that takes place at Grace Church every Tuesday evening at 7 pm from September through June. You are always welcome to join us. We practice two 20 minute periods of centering prayer separated by a meditative walk and followed by a brief lectio divina. For more information, contact Lindsay Boyer at lindsay@lindsayboyer.com or go to http://lindsayboyer.com/weekly_cpg.htm.

To learn more about Bach's Cello Suites, read Eric Soblin's *The Cello Suites: J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece*. To learn more about centering prayer, read Thomas Keating's classic *Open Mind, Open Heart* or David Frenette's excellent new book *The Path of Centering Prayer: Deepening Your Experience of God*.