



Café ([boldcafe.org](http://boldcafe.org)) is a monthly on-line magazine for and with young adult women made possible from support from women's groups active in Women of the ELCA ([welca.org](http://welca.org)), the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

10/01/2020 | Monthly Topic

# Rituals that nourish and ground us

by *Jordan Miller-Stubbendick*

Butter, flour, sugar. My hands level off baking soda and measure out vanilla. I add a cup of chocolate chips and then toss in an extra handful for good measure. I click on the mixer, and my breathing deepens. My heart rate slows, and I relax into the familiarity of giving my hands work to do. This action calms and soothes my mind.

Every week of quarantine for Covid-19, then beyond, as venturing back out into the world was allowed, I have baked muffins. I have rotated among a few favorite recipes, with the occasional variation here or there.

Baking muffins has become a weekly ritual that has given me moments of familiarity during this unusual year. When I don't know how to pray, I bake. When I can't form the words to express what's in my heart, I open my kitchen cabinets, pull eggs and milk out of the refrigerator, preheat the oven, and create something tangible and nourishing.

I have measured and melted and mixed my way through so many uncertainties this year. When my mind is spinning, pulling out a favorite recipe and blending ingredients help me slow down and gain perspective.

We need rituals to anchor us when we feel like we are drifting away in our fears. Rituals are especially helpful in times of change or anxiety. This year looks different now than it did at the beginning. School takes place either with masks and hand sanitizer or through an electronic screen. Our workplace is at home rather than in an office.



We can't gather to celebrate or lament in groups of friends as we used to. Planned trips to see beloved friends or family are on hold.

During so much change, what stays the same?

That we are beloved children of a present and active God never changes. No matter what. God loves us despite Covid-19, the appalling violence inflicted on people of color in our country, and the fires that are ravaging the western United States.

Rituals — actions done with presence and intention — can help us remember this. Rituals tell our bodies and brains that something is about to begin or shift, so get ready. They have the power to move us into a different frame of mind and openness of heart. Prayer before a meal is a ritual. So is celebrating a friend's birthday with a party (even over Zoom)! Lighting a candle is a ritual.

Rituals that ground and nourish us can be connected to faith, but they don't have to be. They help us feel more centered, calmer, especially when life and the world around us are anything but peaceful.

Rituals help us to care for ourselves, to remember that we matter. The way we care for ourselves and others is the way we care for the world. Sometimes care looks like baking, talking with a friend, making a cup of tea, taking a walk or a nap. It all matters and is important. When we take the time to care for ourselves, it is easier and more authentic to extend that same care to the world that God loves so much.

Baking muffins won't change the world. It doesn't end racial injustice or reverse the devastation of Covid-19. But it helps me create something delightful and good in the midst of so much that is not good. It changes the state of my mind and heart. Baking nourishes me so that I can nourish others.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God sees us, knows us, and has compassion for us. God proclaims, "I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15b-16a). Rituals help us slow down enough to hear the still, small voice of God's love that is always within and around us. We are held in God's love when times are calm and when they are chaotic. I remember this best when I use my hands to combine ingredients into a treat that I can touch and taste and share with those I love.

### **Discussion questions**

1. What rituals help you to feel calmer and more grounded?
2. Is there one small thing you could try adding to your day or week that could help you be more centered?

Ideas include a reading one entry each morning or evening from a book of daily readings,

starting your day with a cup of tea or coffee, making a daily or weekly gratitude list, or scheduling a weekly or monthly phone date with a friend.

3. How does doing something with your hands help your mind remember that you are held in God's love?

### **Closing prayer**

Loving God, In times of chaos and confusion, you ground us in your never-failing love. Through the power of rituals, help us center our hands and hearts on your goodness and know we are your beloved. Remind us to care for ourselves as we care for others. Help us remember that you care for us, always.

*Jordan Miller-Stubbendick is an ELCA pastor. She lives outside of Buffalo, N.Y. with her husband, two sons, and golden retriever.*



This article first appeared in the October 2020 issue of *Cafe*.

# Faith Reflections: Just be

*by Jordan Miller-Stubbendick*

Many years ago, I visited a monastery for a few days and was intrigued by the rhythm of the day. It began well before dawn, as the monks awoke for their first of seven set prayer times throughout the day and night. For the monks, each day was well ordered. There were certain times for prayer, for meals, for work, and rest. I find something so appealing about the predictability of this consistent life.

Even more impressive was that when the appointed time for doing an activity was up, the monks stopped doing it. They did not try to squeeze one more thing into their work hours or add one more prayer to their worship time. There was enough time in their schedule for all that needed to be done, and when the clock said they were finished with something, they stopped.

This schedule fascinated me because, most of the time, it is in direct opposition to the way I tend to live my life.

I often think that I can get one more thing done in a given amount of time. And that accomplishing that one more thing will make everything better. My husband and I joke that I think everything should take “just 15 minutes.” I am tempted to believe if I could check everything off my list, or come up with some mythical, monastic-inspired schedule, I could wrangle life into going my way.

But as we know well, life has a way of going differently from how we plan. People get sick, cars break down, or a sudden storm comes up and changes the day’s events. A global pandemic changes almost everything about life as we know it. Despite our best efforts, we can’t always make life go smoothly or turn out the way we wish.

My efforts to keep things going can only do so much. This year has given each of us ample opportunity to remember this truth over and over. We do our best, but there is much we can’t control or change in our world, our life situations, and our feelings — much as we wish we could.

I have found it helpful to stop trying to do so much this year, especially when I'm overwhelmed, frustrated, or sad. It is hard to remember but doing more is not always the answer. Permitting myself to sit with my feelings without trying to fix or change them has been healing. When I don't try to do just one more thing or push my feelings away, I tend to get more done and move through my feelings quicker.

Psalm 46:10 reminds us: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Sometimes the hardest reaction is to be still. But it can be helpful and healing.

How can we allow ourselves space and grace to be as we are, experience our emotions, and know that God is in the midst of all we are and everything we are feeling?

We can start by sitting in a quiet place and breathing. Listen to your breath going in and out. The ancient Greek word, *pneuma*, for spirit and breath is the same. When breathing in, you could imagine that the Holy Spirit is filling you with life and love.

Be still, and know that God is God.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

When it is time, you can move on. At any time, you can come back to your breath, to the power and creativity and sustenance of God giving you life. You can be still and know. Your worth does not depend on how much you accomplish or the schedule you keep. Keep coming back to your breath and the stillness as often as needed.

It is enough, and you are enough.

The monks would approve.



## Discussion questions

1. Is it hard for you to embrace being instead of doing?
2. What helps you to be still and know that God is God?
3. How can you remember that you are God's beloved one, cherished by God?

## Closing prayer

Mother God, When we base our worth on how much we get done, remind us that we matter because you have made us each precious and irreplaceable. Guide us to times of stillness, times to rest in your love and presence. Fill us with your Holy Spirit's breath of life, moment after moment, day after day. Help us to be still and know that you are. Amen.

*Jordan Miller-Stubbendick is an ELCA pastor. She lives outside of Buffalo, NY with her husband, two sons, and golden retriever.*



These articles first appeared in the October 2020 issue of Cafe (<http://boldcafe.org>).