

UUCMC Covenant Circle Session

November, 2019: Attention

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

This is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know
that the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness.

— Mary Oliver

Reminder of our Covenant

Check-In (3-4 minutes each)

Topic with Readings

Word Roots

Attention stems from the Latin *ad* (toward) and *tendere* (to stretch), meaning “to stretch toward.”

We need to remember that our word tender also comes from *tendere*. So, the tenderness of our attention comes both from our reaching toward something out of love, and also in the way stretching ourselves towards something changes us and makes us more tender.

Wise Words

At a certain point you say
to the woods, to the sea,
to the mountains, the world,
Now I am ready.
Now I will stop and be wholly attentive.
You empty yourself and wait, listening...

— Annie Dillard

Looking but not seeing is the hearing but not understanding of the eye.

— MokokomaMokhonoana

Real attention needs empathy; attention without feeling is just a report.

— Mary Oliver

If we want to support each other's inner lives, we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard.

— Parker J. Palmer

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of society, say, or the super-ego, or self-interest. By and large a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

— Frederick Buechner

Your attention is like a combination spotlight and vacuum cleaner: It highlights what it lands on and then sucks it into your brain—for better or worse.

— Dr. Rick Hanson

If you take a deep breath and look around, “Look what's happening to me!” can become “Look what's happening!” And what's happening? The incredible drama of life is happening. And we're in it!

— Sylvia Boorstein

When I take a deep breath and pull in the reins of my “hurry” I begin to find the numinous everywhere. I notice the soft breeze and how it caresses, soothes, and quiets me. I look out the window beyond my desk and I see not just trees, I see how they behold the sun and receive the nurturance offered to them. I speak with someone on the phone and I hear not just a person's voice, but also the bond of life that connects us.

— Joyce Rupp

Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not, God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next.

— Frederick Buechner

I've always thought that you don't love a country by turning a blind eye to its crimes and to a problem. The way that you love a country is by seeing everything that it's done wrong, all of its mistakes, and still thinking that it's beautiful and that it's worthy.

— Junot Diaz

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

— James Baldwin

There is no more time for pretending that everything can be all right without your care, without your attention.

— Rev. Theresa I. Soto

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.
— attributed to the Buddha

Imagine how our lives might be if everyone had even a bit more of the wisdom that comes from seeing clearly. Suppose people everywhere, simultaneously, stopped what they were doing and paid attention for only as long as it took to recognize their shared humanity. Surely the heartbreak of the world's pain, visible to all, would convert everyone to kindness.
— Sylvia Boorstein

To surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence.
— Thomas Merton

Every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves. If we concentrate this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is better than a great many good works.
— Simone Weil

Noticing

I would not have seen the web
a spider strung between us and sky
except the sun crested the cliff...
So much depends on where one looks...
Too often the little voices
that say "See!" and "There!" are silent...
— Janisse Ray

I have always seen it as a kind of parental duty to show my own children beautiful stuff, and in so doing reveal to them an alternate world.
— Nick Cave

He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person.
— Arthur Miller

Forget about enlightenment.
Sit down wherever you are
And listen to the wind singing in your veins.
Feel the love, the longing, the fear in your bones.
Open your heart to who you are, right now,
Not who you would like to be,
Not the saint you are striving to become,
But the being right here before you, inside you, around you.
All of you is holy.
You are already more and less

Than whatever you can know.
Breathe out,
Touch in,
Let go.

— John Welwood

What is this life if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare.
— William Henry Davies

The world is full of magic things, waiting for our senses to grow sharper.
— W.B. Yeats

Silent Reflection

Questions to prompt discussion (choose ones that work for you)

1. Who was the first person in your life to offer you their attention, without adding their advice?
2. Who in your life needs you to offer them the gift of attention without advice?
3. Would you be pleased if your gravestone read: “She attended well to a few worthy things”?
4. When you were young, did your family teach you to look away from uncomfortable truths or to call attention to them?
5. Is it time to look upon yourself with a bit more tenderness?
6. Where in your life would it help to say, 'Look what's happening!' rather than 'Look what's happening to me!'?
7. Have you ever given your attention so deeply to something that you suddenly felt one with it?
8. Has looking ever made the world suddenly seem magical to you? Do you miss that magic?
9. Have you become too good at staying focused on the wrongs done to you?

10. Gurus and psychologists alike tell us that we become what we give our attention to. What has more of your attention - and more of yourself - than you want?
11. When was the last time you let your attention linger on beauty? Did you keep your gaze there long enough to feel changed? Or to hear it speak to you?
12. Something has been pulling at your attention lately. Do you know why?
13. Is it time to pay a bit less attention to what you hope your life *will* be?
14. When growing up, what one thing above all others did your family tell you was worthy of attention? Beauty? Duty? Kindness? Honesty? Education? Loyalty? Success? God?
15. What in your life is hungry to be noticed?
16. What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Housekeeping Details

How goes your service project plans? Do you need ideas? Lisa, Michelle, Craig, or Virginia are happy to help!

Check-out

Closing Words

What you see you become.
— Deepak Chopra