

I. Advanced organizer

- A. This month, **thrift stores everywhere have been swamped with an unprecedented amount of donations.** Goodwills across the country have seen people lining up bringing dozens of bags of clothing and other items, much more than is typical at this time of year.
1. *New Yorker* fashion reporter Rachel Syme went to one of these thrift stores in Brooklyn recently and went down a line of people waiting to turn in their donations. “Are you here because of the show?” she asked them, and nine out of ten said yes.
 2. “The Show” of course is Netflix’s new hit **“Tidying Up with Marie Kondo”**, which has taken Kondo’s methodology even more mainstream. **Kondo has been transforming lives through tidying for years, thanks to her bestselling books like *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up***, and the sold out workshops she’s conducted teaching her methodology around the globe, but as all the cool kids know, you really want to change the world: you do a show for Netflix.
 3. In the Martens’ world, the tidying craze has hit close to home. It started with Jason watching the show, and after a fairly typical but always frustrating struggle with the kids over cleaning their room, he declared to me that it was time to try it Marie Kondo’s way. We got the book. We got the kids to watch a few episodes, and then last weekend, we began the process for ourselves, with Jason taking the lead. Last weekend we did clothes. Yesterday, was step 2: books. The kids have actually gotten pretty into it, actually looking forward this week to when their laundry was ready to be folded and put away, which right there feels like a win.
 4. **What makes the KonMarie method, as she calls it, unique, is that it’s not simply about purging your stuff and improving your storage.** Don’t get me wrong, those are core components, but Marie Kondo is encouraging more than just a thinning of your closet. **She’s inviting folks to mindfulness in regards to possessions.** She asks her clients to take every item they possess in their hands and ask the question, **“Does this spark joy?”** If it does, she invites them to keep it and find a tidy place for it to live. If it doesn’t, she encourages them to thank the item for its usefulness and then let it go. As Goodwill is discovering, a lot of people have recently discovered there are many things in their cupboards and dressers that do not spark joy.
 5. Now **there are fair critiques** of the philosophy and methodology in the KonMarie method and the privilege it assumes to be able to easily discard things. I understand these, I think they’re fair critiques. But what I do find intriguing and that does seem to ring true about what she’s doing is **the core belief at the heart of her method. At the heart of the KonMari method is an understanding that before your daily habits can change, first you must change the way you think about them.** Kondo firmly believes that if your possessions are not just stuff to be managed, but in your mind they are items you have thoughtfully chosen to bring forward with you into the future you want to have, you will likely regard caring for them differently.
 6. I start with this because it strikes me as relevant to the teaching series we’re engaging in here at the beginning of the year, a series on discernment. That’s essentially what Marie Kondo is inviting her clients into. She’s asking them to be discerning in regards to their possessions.
- B. Now I’m calling our teaching series “Hearing through Noise”, and in it I’m inviting us to consider how we might better gauge what is truth, what’s the voice of God in our lives, and what is something else, particularly when we’ve got so many things competing for our attention; so much noise. Two weeks ago I suggested that the first step is to “Turn Down the

Volume”, actively making space for contemplation and quiet, turning down the volume a bit on some of the things shouting for our attention. Hopefully some of you have experimented with that over the last couple of weeks. Even if its not a daily thing, perhaps you’ve made a little more space for stillness and paying attention. So what’s the next step? I’m gonna suggest that perhaps the next helpful step could be summed up like this, **“Know Your Own Voice.”**

1. **Once we make the space for stillness, once we turn down the volume of life and begin to pay attention to our thoughts, what next?** What do we do with that space to cultivate our capacity to discern where the Divine may be speaking to us?
 2. I came to personal faith as a young adult in a more charismatic church that taught that God can speak to us, and we can essentially hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in our own mind. **But one of the classic quandaries that trying to listen for that introduces is the question “Is that God or is that me?”** Is that God’s voice or is that my own?
 3. It’s always a legit question, and generally one that can’t be fully discerned looking at your own experience in your head alone. **But a part of even being able to begin to start answering that question, has to be understanding more about what you’re bringing to the table.** How does the way you’re wired, your unique way of interacting in the world, your desires, your fears...how do all of those things shape what you discern? How can you even begin to say what is from you verses the Holy Spirit, if you don’t really understand your own voice?
 4. So it seems to me that a necessary component in developing greater discernment, has to be **developing greater self-awareness.** You can’t decide what to keep and care for and what to let go of, without an awareness of what you cherish. In the same way, you can’t easily follow Jesus on a journey into wholeness if you’re not clear on where you personally experience brokenness.
- II. Let’s think about Jesus for a bit. **What role did self-awareness play in his life?**
- A. I think we can easily fall into the trap of assuming Jesus just was self-aware - he was fully aware of his own identity, what motivated him, what he was gifted in, what he was challenged by - simply because he was God incarnate. He had that superhero thing going, we think. He’s like Thor or Superman - looks like a human but definitely has powers that most humans don’t have. But this, I think, doesn’t take seriously enough the meaning behind the affirmation our faith makes that the Word became flesh, that God dwelt in human form in the person of Jesus. We can too easily forget that **Jesus was limited.** That’s actually the heart of the mystery that is the incarnation. **Without limitation there is no incarnation.**
 - B. The story isn’t that the source of all life simply presents as a man, but is still really God. The story is that the Divine One makes themselves less. **The divine is limited.** For the first time, God is born. God has questions. God has stuff to figure out. God in human form - Jesus is dependent on human relationships to help him grow into a person with a unique identity. **He has to become self-aware.** And I would argue that the Gospel stories reflect just that: a man who doesn’t simply have all the answers from the beginning, but a man who, like all of us, is on a journey of self-discovery and fulfillment, who is becoming ever more aware of who he is, how he is connected to and able to reveal God’s presence in the world, what purposeful life looks like for him, and how he can participate in it fully.
 - C. Let’s look at the arc:
 1. Besides his infancy, the first time we see Jesus in the gospels is in Luke 2, as a boy of twelve, almost a grown man in the culture of his day. His family has gone to Jerusalem as part of the large annual pilgrimage they take with their community. And after the festival,

their group is caravanning back and a day into the voyage home, Mary and Joseph realize they don't know where Jesus is. They look among their friends and relatives, and he's not with any of them, so likely a bit panicked they go back to Jerusalem to see if they can find him:

a) 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Jesus were astonished at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were overwhelmed. His mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." 49 But he replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" 50 Yet his parents did not understand the remark he made to them. (Luke 2:45 - 50)

- b) so here we see young Jesus, at the age of twelve, already has a profound self-awareness that is developing. He understands on some level his identity and it's implications, perhaps more than his parents at this point, who are, likely the people who've given him the most clues up to this point about who he is, where he came from, how he is connected to God, as they likely told him stories of his birth and early years.
 - c) Jesus understands that he is connected to the Divine in an intimate way. Already, he calls God his Father. He understands that he needs to be with people who are devoted to the things of his Father. That he has belonging with God, in God's sacred place, with people of God. "Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?"
 - d) But there is also a quest young Jesus is on of curiosity. He doesn't have all the answers, that's why he's there. He's sitting with the teachers of the law asking questions. He's eager to learn. As much as he's impressive in what he's already perceived, he also knows he has a lot to learn. He's trying to understand deeper who God is, and how he is connected to what God is doing in the world.
2. By the time Jesus is an adult, released into ministry, he seems to have developed a more keen capacity for self-awareness and discernment, likely cultivated in times he spends in solitude, like the 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry. And now he's teaching it. He's calling his followers into it. Instruction around self-examination and deepening self-awareness is core to what he preaches. It's at the heart of his famous Sermon on the Mount.
- a) He tells them things like "Don't give in public, where others are sure to applaud your giving, but do it in secret. Same with when you pray or fast. Don't let your devotion to God simply be a way of earning you points in the eyes of people around you." He wants them to check their motives. To examine their hearts. And then there's this one:
 - b) "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For by the standard you judge you will be judged, and the measure you use will be the measure you receive. 3 Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye, but fail to see the beam of wood in your own? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye,' while there is a beam in your own? 5 You hypocrite! First remove the beam from your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7:1-5)**
 - c) Often, I think a lot of us look at this verse and focus on the part of not judging others. Strangely, we often pull it out as a snarky tool for calling someone else out when we see them being judgmental, particularly in a religious context. But how many of us are

actually willing to sit in and respond to Jesus' invitation to our own self examination, which is arguably the point? To making space to regularly look for the beams in our own eyes, rather than just criticizing others for not doing that?

3. Finally, we see Jesus still on this journey of deepening self-awareness and understanding as he wrestles excruciatingly the night before his death in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has had his last Passover with his followers, some twenty or so years after the passover that had him lingering in the temple. And now he is coming to terms with his own call not only to observe the Passover, but essentially to become the Passover lamb himself. And yet he feels in himself the conflict between what he senses God is asking of him and what his own human self desires. So he asks his closest three friends to join him in the garden in prayer.

a) ***"37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. 38 Then he said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.' 39 Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will.' 40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, 'So, couldn't you stay awake with me for one hour? 41 Stay awake and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' 42 He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will must be done.' 43 He came again and found them sleeping; they could not keep their eyes open. 44 So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same thing once more."*** (Matthew 26:37-44)

b) **Three times we see Jesus wrestling.** Over and over he prays the same desperate prayer: "take this cup away. Don't make me do this. Let there be another way." But ultimately, each time he lands in "not my will but yours, O God."

c) Looking at him alongside the other characters in the story, we see the contrast between his own raw self-awareness, as he cries out to God, clear that he is in conflict and doesn't have what is needed for what's to come, and the complete lack of awareness in his friends, who have no idea what they should be about in this moment, despite their teacher's pleas.

d) What this Gethsemane encounter shows me is that **Jesus was not serenely going through the motions of life, he was working hard to align his own human heart with the heart of the Divine.** "Not what I will, but what you will," he prayed again and again. It was work, right up until his last moments, as he fully felt the desolation he was experiencing, asking **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**, as well as compassion for his clueless and unself-aware fellow humans saying, **"Forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."** And finally, with his last breath he could fully surrender to the Divine will saying, **"Into your hands I commend my spirit."**

III. So if this rings true, that an important part of discerning the will of God, or hearing the Spirit's promptings in our own noisy lives involves growing deeper in self awareness, in getting to know our own voice, how might we engage in that endeavor? What is the work we need to be doing?

A. Truthfully there are a lot of practices we could engage in that would help us become more self aware.

1. The KonMari method has been said not only to help folks get their houses tidier, but has given many folks who've tried it a capacity to be in more touch with what brought them joy in other areas of their life as well.
 2. Journaling is a way many people become more aware of their own inner voice as they begin to put that voice outside of their head, and observe it on the written page.
 3. Therapy is certainly a tool that can yield important breakthroughs in self-awareness and understanding of one's voice.
 4. The classic Christian spiritual disciplines of confession, fasting, prayer and contemplation, as well as deep spiritual community where folks come to know each other intimately all have been found as useful in growing in deeper self-understanding.
- B. I want to spend the rest of our time considering one particular tool that I have found particularly powerful. It's a tool for personal spiritual and psychological awareness and growth, called the **Enneagram**.
1. I know that the Enneagram is not new to many of us, but it may be to some. (Raise your hand if your familiar with it. Keep you hand up if you're fairly confident you know your Enneagram type.)
 2. I'm going to spend a little time considering the usefulness of this particular tool not because I want all of you to become Enneagram devotees. But I do know that this is a tool for self-examination and understanding that has brought unique helpfulness into my own life, and I believe others in our community as well. **I hope considering a little bit about what this system is, and hearing some of my story might encourage you, if nothing else to consider what kind of system of self-examination and growth might be helpful for you**, whether it be this, or something else. And my hope is that for those of us who have used the Enneagram in the past, during this time we are discerning, we might revisit some of our insights from that work, and see how they come to bear on this discernment conversation, or see what new things in this season God might be inviting us to examine and grow into.
 3. So first of all, **what is the Enneagram?** Essentially it is a typology that describes nine different kinds of people. The word "Enneagram" comes from Greek, essentially mean nine figures or nine signs. It tries to tell us how people are different from one another. In that way, it is similar in some ways to other typologies you may be aware of, like astrological typologies or psychological personality profiles like Myers-Briggs. But as Franciscan Friar and contemporary mystic Richard Rohr, points out, **the Enneagram is also a unique typology because it is dynamic**.
 - a) *"The Enneagram is more than an entertaining game for learning about oneself. It is concerned with change and making a turnaround, with what the religious traditions call conversion or repentance. It confronts us with compulsions and laws under which we live - usually without being aware of it - and it aims to invite us to go beyond them, to take steps into the domain of freedom."* Richard Rohr
 - b) Author Christopher Heuertz describes the typology this way: *"The contemporary Enneagram of Personality* illustrates the nine ways we get lost, but also the nine ways we can come home to our True Self. Put another way, it exposes nine ways we lie to ourselves about who we think we are, nine ways we can come clean about those illusions, and nine ways we can find our way back to God."* More than just a personality indicator, the Enneagram provides what Heuertz calls **a sacred map** to wholeness.
 4. So **where does this sacred map come from?** Well, the origins of the system are believed to be quite ancient, likely pre-Christian. Historic evidence has been found of images like the current enneagram or descriptions of nine types in ancient cultures around the world.

Legends around the development of the enneagram abound, including that it influence all of the major religious and philosophical traditions, and was enriched by them as it was passed down. But it was in the mid 20th century, likely influenced by the Sufi mystics in Asia, that Westerners began to develop the contemporary version that is known by many today. One of the first major spiritual and psychological teachers of the Enneagram in the United States in the 1970s and 80s was psychologist **Dr. Claudio Naranjo, who first taught the system to a community in his backyard here in Berkeley.** It was in this era that **the Jesuits were introduced to the Enneagram as well**, and initially through them it was utilized and spread as an important and useful tool in Christian discipleship, and since that time, many have discovered the usefulness of the Enneagram's wisdom in the practice of Jesus-centered faith.

5. I don't have time to go through all nine types, nor is that my intention today, to help everyone learn their particular type, if they don't know it. On your sheet, I'm giving you a little overview of them, as well as some good resources to check out if you're interested in learning more about the Enneagram and perhaps discerning your type. An important thing to know as you discern is that the Enneagram isn't just meant to stroke your ego, or give you a little boost of narcissistic fun, like some of those online quizzes that tell you what Hogwarts house you belong in, or what Disney Princess you'd be. The Enneagram helps identify your core strengths, but also challenges you to recognize their shadow side; how your strengths are actually masks for your greatest weaknesses. Because of this, discovering our type will usually feel at least a bit humiliating, as the motives behind how we operate are unmasked by our beginning to understand our type. But this is the beginning of our path to true freedom and wholeness.
6. Today, **I am simply going to invite us to look together at three core categories that the nine types fall into**, and how, even just considering those categories alone, we can receive insight about how we as individuals function and what we might need to grow in discernment.
7. The three categories I'm talking about are called **the three Enneagram Intelligence Centers**. What is meant by that is that each of us has a primary lens through which we take in the world. We each have a center of gravity that we lead with as we navigate the human experience. All of us physical instincts, emotions, and thoughts that drive our behavior, but the Enneagram asserts that **each of us has one of these that's dominant, that comes most naturally, that is the primary filter through which we experience reality**. Consider if one of these seems familiar to you.
 - a) Some people are led by what they might call their Gut. The Enneagram calls this the **Body Center** (or Gut, or Instinct) - Types 8, 9, and 1 - These people **experience life through intuitive instinct and tactile engagement of their senses**. They seem to be led by instinct, by a sense that they simply know what is clearly needed and are impassioned to bring it about. Heuertz says this of them, "People in the instinctive center engage the world through activity in an effort to assert and maintain a sense of their control....At their best, gut people harness this energy and direct it through their initiating ability to build a better world; at their worst, it seems everything annoys them." Frustration is a particular challenge of those in the Body Center.
 - b) Some people seem more led by their **hearts** or their response to their feelings. The so called **Heart Center** includes types 2, 3, and 4. Their energy is drawn toward others. They are often intensely relational, and thrive in social situations. However, in some ways, while these folks are led by their hearts, they're also often disconnected from

their own feelings. Heart people are generally more directed to the feelings of others and care very much about how others feel about them, then aware of how they themselves feel. Shame is a particular challenge for those in the Heart Center.

- c) Then there are folks who seem to lead with their **Heads**. They think their feelings more than feel them. This describes people in the 5, 6, and 7 groups. They live in the land of ideas, and make decisions often through lists of pros and cons. Rohr says of them “In every situation the members of this group first take a step backward to reflect.” Fear of the unknown or unforeseen is a motivating challenge for those who lead with their heads, which is why they spend so much energy trying to reason things through, in order to provide security in their lives.
8. **I myself am an Enneagram 3**, and I’ve been reflecting recently on how my type and my heart center impact my connection with others, with myself, and with God.
- a) As heart people, 3s are led by feelings, specifically how they perceive others feel towards them. 3s amongst the heart group are particularly adept at reading others perceptions and opinions and shaping themselves to be most appealing and pleasing to others. They have high radars for others feelings and they naturally mirror them. But being connected to their own feelings, is much more of a challenge.
 - b) When I consider myself, I confess that I recognize these patterns in me. My 3-ness serves me well in many ways as a pastor. My radar for others feelings helps me empathize and sense what the folks I’m caring for need in any given moment. But if I’m not careful, a detachment from my own feelings, and a lack of awareness of my own needs can fuel work that becomes superficial and simply performative, instead of grounded in genuine conviction. In this particularly trying season of challenge, where I have a lot going on emotionally, I recognize that I need to find ways to get more deeply in touch with what I’m feeling and allow those feelings to be expressed so that there isn’t a big gap between where I’m really at, and what I feel like I need to perform for approval and acceptance.
9. So how do I go about that? How do any of us take the first step in trying to bring greater wholeness to the broken parts of ourselves?
- a) Even without understanding our whole type, **attending to our center of intelligence can give us a place to start**. Teachers of the Enneagram point to a corrective for the ways that each of these centers gets off-balance, and that can serve as a starting point for growth. As you’ll see, these three correctives are similar but distinct in important ways.
 - b) **For those in the Body (or Gut) Center - stillness is an important antidote** to the activity that Gut people are led by. Chris Heuertz says this, “The gift of stillness refines the Body Center’s instinctive drive to do by creating interior accountability for *proper* engagement in their active life.” If you resonate with the Body Center, then considering where you can cultivate more stillness in your life, where there is no pressure for productivity and no expectation of outcome. From that place you are more likely to discern what kind of engagement you really feel called to put your time and energy into. From that place God can speak more clearly to you.
 - c) Folks like me in the Heart Center - **we need solitude**. We spend so much of our energy fed by others feelings towards us, it’s important we make space to withdraw from those, so we can begin to feel ourselves. This is my antidote to my extroverted, chameleon empathetic three self. As much as I love being with you and others in my life, I’m recognizing a need more clearly to prioritize being alone, so that my radar for others feelings can be shut down for awhile, and I can tune into myself instead. As

Heuertz puts it, “Solitude teaches us how to be present—present to God, to ourselves, and to others with no strings attached.”

- d) Head folks - **your invitation is to silence.** It’s not simply a quieting of activity, but it’s a quieting of the questions and calculations in your own mind. What if you were to silence the voices of worry, the what-ifs and cost-benefit analyses for awhile, and just listen? To these folks Heuertz encourages, “Silence helps us learn how to listen to the voice of God in our lives, a voice we may have been unable to recognize before. Silence helps us listen to the people in our lives who speak loving words of truth or affirmation over us. And silence helps us to listen to ourselves—our desires and fears.”

C. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be limited by a blindness to my own brokenness. I don’t want to be unable to hear the voice of God, or of my own heart, because my radar is too tuned in to the voices of other people in any room I’m in. I want to have the capacity that Jesus had to understand more about how I am uniquely made, how I am connected to my Creator, how my will can align with God’s. I want to have the insight and courage to attend to the beams in my own eyes, to remove the things that keep me from seeing clearly, and from that clarity of that improved vision, to participate in the freeing of others to do the work to see clearly as well.

1. Your map may not be the Enneagram. But I encourage you to consider what it might be. What guides can you use to raise your own awareness of yourself. What mirrors to your should might help you identify the beams in your eyes? What role might silence, stillness, or solitude play in your growth and healing? How might you get to know your own voice?

D. The good news is that none of us have to take this journey alone. I believe Jesus wants us to grow in wholeness, not to be bound by our types and their limitations but to live more fully into all we were created to be. Jesus’ gift to us in this endeavor, is the same Spirit he was gifted with as he grew in discernment. A Spirit that brings freedom. As Paul put it, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is present, there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17). May we all sense that freedom not to be trapped in our limitations but to grow in knowing our own voices, and using them for healing and liberation. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation:

1. What practices have you found helpful in growing in self-awareness? Have those helped you become familiar with your own voice?
2. Do you have experience with the Enneagram? How have you found it to be helpful? How have you found it to be challenging?
3. Which do you think you are most in need of: stillness, solitude, or silence? Why? Why?