

“Ciderspace” October 18, 2009

How many of you have taken the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory? If you have, then you are aware that the series of questions that we answer ultimately result in a four-letter personality type. I’m not going to go through the whole thing, but want to point out that there’s one set of letters that has to do with what we’re talking about today. It’s the second set, which ends up with either an “N” or a “S.”

The “N” stands for iNtuition, which means that we gather our information basically through that sixth sense, our gut. What is it that we just seem to know, without necessarily seeing anything specific? For example, we walk into a room, and we immediately sense the tension in the air. If we were to look around closely, we might not observe anything specific that would point that out, but somehow we just know it.

An “S” personality type, however, gathers his or her information quite differently. This is the kind of person who uses the senses—you know, sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste—and draws information from what is seen, heard, smelled, etc. This is generally a much more observant person than the “N” type, and would make a great eyewitness to any kind of incident, because they’re so aware of the various details around what has happened.

While we may have distinct preferences one way or the other, we all have some of both within us. It’s always worth our while to develop both to a greater degree, because both have their advantages, and both can help us make our way in this world. I tend to be fairly dominant on the “N” scale, and not so strong on the “S” scale, so while I certainly need to honor and pay attention to what my intuition is telling me, I also need to become more attuned to what my senses are telling me. That, to me, is always a challenge.

You may be wondering why I’m bringing that up today, and I guess it’s just that I’ve become more aware that we are fully into the season of autumn. Yes, of course, it’s plain from looking at the calendar, but it’s more than just knowing that it’s mid-October. It has to do with the “feel” of fall: the leaves being blown about by the wind; the smell of a fire in the fireplace; the taste of hot cider or warm cocoa; the sight of

pumpkins and corn stalks and dried flowers around us.

The sights and sounds of fall really tell us a lot, if we pay attention to them. Yet I doubt that we all do that, and I have to count myself among those who don’t—at least, not very well. Sometimes our days are just too hurried, and our calendars too packed to take some time to look around and see what we can observe. It’s like we’re on auto-pilot going through the world, paying little or no attention to what’s happening in our midst.

In some ways, many of us could fit into the Bible passage we have for today. Let me give you a little background before we look at the passage from Matthew’s gospel, because this is one of those passages around which scholars have differing thoughts. Actually, similar stories appear in the original gospel, Mark, and in Luke’s writing, and all three are somewhat different. Let’s see what it has to say: **“The reason I use parables in talking to them is that they look, but do not see, and they listen, but do not hear or understand. So the prophecy of Isaiah applies to them:**

‘This people will listen and listen, but not understand;

**They will look and look, but not see,
Because their minds are dull,
And they have stopped up their ears
And closed their eyes.**

Otherwise their eyes would see, their ears would hear,

**Their minds would understand,
And they would turn to me, says God
And I would heal them.’**

As for you, how fortunate you are! Your eyes see and your ears hear. I assure you that many prophets and many of God’s people wanted very much to see what you see, but they could not, and to hear what you hear, but they did not.”

Jesus is the one speaking, and he’s talking to his friends the disciples, and responding to the question they have asked. They wanted to know why he always used stories (parables, as they’re called) when he talked to the people who gathered to hear him. In offering his explanation, Jesus says, “they look but do not see, and they listen, but do not hear or understand.” In other words, they don’t seem to get it, if he tries to say things in a straightforward manner.

However, he points out that when he tells stories, things are different. They seem to understand, because Jesus says, “How

fortunate you are that your eyes see and your ears hear.” “Your eyes see and your ears hear,” he says. They seem to be taking things in through their senses, and they understand.

Well, it seems to me that we could well benefit by taking things in through our senses, because in doing so, we just might understand in a new and deeper way. We might become a little more awed by the people and the wonders of nature around us. We might be filled with gratitude for the beauty that fills our lives, beauty that we so often fail to see. In other words, we just might live our lives more fully and more joyfully if we decided to use our senses to their fullest.

Every season offers us those opportunities you know. I read about the thrill Dave DeLand of St. Cloud, Minnesota has around the game of baseball. He wrote, “It’s about the smells that greet you at the gate: freshly cut grass, grilling hot dogs, popping corn, leather and pine tar and horsehide.”

Or we could consider something Anne-Marie Ooman wrote when enduring a long winter in northern Michigan, and yearning for a sign of spring. She admitted to being quite grumpy about how long winter had been, and going to a store to buy some flowers to brighten her home. There, she encountered a construction worker who advised her to listen for the sounds of spring. He said you could hear it from Lake Michigan—a sound telling the residents that the wind had changed and spring was on its way. She thought he was crazy, but after all, her home was two miles from the beach and she never heard the lake in winter because of the distance and ice, nor did she hear it in summer because of the full canopy of trees overhead.

She pulled into her driveway, opened her car door, and stopped quietly to listen. There, unmistakably, was the distant thrum, the sound of moving water, and she knew it was the distant voice of an awakening lake, and as she put it, “A sign for the impatient to be patient.)

So, now we’re in fall. How might we go about slowing down a bit, and looking and listening, and smelling and tasting and touching and feeling all that makes it fall? Are there rituals and routines you have that might help others of us take it all in?

We have some friends, for example, who really, really enjoy fall, and one of their traditions is having a “weenie roast” at their outdoor fire pit, in front of a roaring fire, shivering just a little with the evening chill, and munching on an overdone hot dog. These same friends

enjoy the fall colors, and have a ritual of heading south toward Brown County, but trying to avoid the traffic and crowdedness of a Nashville fall day. They go toward Brownstown instead, and have shared with us a beautiful ridge drive where you can see for miles and take in all the beautiful fall colors with the rush of cars and traffic.

I get the yearning on some of those coolish fall Saturdays to prepare my fall meal. I know that you know that I don’t cook—not much, and not well. However, one thing I love on a fall day is a pot of chili, a glass of milk, topped off with some pumpkin pie. In my view, there’s nothing better.

I’m sure you all have some good ideas to share, and I’d invite you to do so. There are papers on your table, and if you’ll take a few minutes and write down a fall delight that you enjoy to share with the rest of us. We’ll put them together and have them as ideas for each of us to use before the beautiful fall weather comes to an end.

You see, this will be accomplishing two things: it will cause us to slow down a bit to look around us, and it will cause us to touch, taste, smell, look at and hear all that God has put around for us to enjoy and appreciate. When we do that, our eyes *will* see, and our ears *will* hear. And oh yeah, don’t forget to taste the cider!

Closing:

Kim Weber, writing in the Providence, Rhode Island *Journal Bulletin*, said: “October, here’s to you. Here’s to the heady aroma of frost-kissed apples, the winery smell of ripened grapes, the wild-as-the-wind smell of hickory nuts and the nostalgic whiff of that first wood smoke.”

October, autumn, here’s to you! Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.