

2019 11 17 – Walking a Sacred Path

Psalm 25

“To you, O God, I lift my soul, my God in you I trust.” A psalm is both a prayer and a song. This psalm, #25, like many of the psalms, is attributed to King David. A man whose life is described in detail in the Hebrew Scriptures, a man who we know as a songwriter, a warrior, a great king, a liar, an adulterer, and a murderer. This psalm is a prayer for help in a time of trouble: “Let me not be put to shame, nor my foes gloat over me.” It is a prayer for guidance in a time of discernment: “Show me your ways; teach me your paths.” It is a prayer for forgiveness from a man who recognizes his own sins and offences: “Remember your mercy, O God, and your steadfast love, for they are as old as time.” Psalm 25 is a humble prayer written by a man who knows where to turn for help.

We all have times in our lives when we need to turn to God for comfort, for help, for guidance and even for forgiveness. I remember a time in my own life when I was finishing my studies for ministry. It was the fall of my last year at Emmanuel College and I was struggling with the idea of becoming an ordained minister and possibly wearing an alb or an academic robe. My fear was that if I wore the gown that's all that people would see, that I would become my role and would lose who I was as a person. There were, and still are, so many parts of me: student, MBA grad, woman, mathematician, sister, project manager, teacher, nature lover, friend and preacher. I wanted to be seen for all that I was. At that time in my life, I was uncertain and afraid. I needed comfort, help and guidance.

King David, like all the rest of us, was a mixture of strength and weakness, of good and bad. He was human. But King David knew that no matter what he did, he would always be a beloved child of God. King David knew that when he needed guidance God would be there to show him the path, to guide him to do what was right. So he prayed.

In my fear and uncertainty I also turned to God. In October 2004, I spent two days at Loyola Centre, participating in a silent retreat. It was my second time at the retreat centre - I had been there five years before when I was deciding whether to begin my studies for ministry. I knew that Loyola Centre was a good place to focus on my connection with God. On this second trip I was delighted to find a labyrinth mowed into the grass in the field beside Loyola Centre.

For those of you who are not familiar with this spiritual tool, a labyrinth is not a maze or a puzzle to be solved but rather a path of meaning to be experienced. The path is usually circular and convoluted, but, unlike a maze, it has no dead ends. A labyrinth has one entrance -- one way in and one way out. When we walk the path, we go around short curves and long curves; sometimes we are out on the edge, sometimes we circle around the center. When we walk the labyrinth, we are never really lost, but we can never quite see where we are going and we are often amazed at where we end up. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/meaning-of-life_b_1584775

Fifteen years ago, I took my fears and uncertainties with me and I walked the labyrinth at Loyola Centre. As I walked towards the centre I breathed deeply of

the clear air and let go of any pre-conceived notions I might have had about who I would be as an ordained minister. I followed the curves and allowed my mind to clear of everything but the path before me. I recognized my fears and then I let them go. When I reached the centre of the labyrinth I stayed there for a while and allowed myself to be bathed in the love of God. In that time, I realized that the only person who could determine my identity, my role, was me. I left the centre with a sense of calm and as I meandered through that same path back out of the labyrinth I thought of all the ways that this new vocation would change my identity. I thought of all the new tasks that I would be doing that would test the boundaries of who I was and I knew that God would be with me whatever path my life would take. As long as I allowed God to be my guide the path that I was walking would be a sacred path.

Walking the sacred path of the labyrinth is another form of prayer. It is one of the many forms of prayer that are available to us. This week, at our ministerial meeting we took time, as we often do, to pray with and for each other. We divided into pairs and were asked to think of a particular verse or passage in scripture which had been important to us in our lives. The person that I was with talked about a difficult time in her life where she wasn't sure what direction to take, when she felt uncertain of her path. The scripture that spoke to her in that time was Isaiah 30:21, "And when you turn to the right, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way – walk in it."

That is exactly what it means to walk a sacred path in our lives. Walking a sacred path is about listening for the voice of God. I want to share with you

another story, a story that I found in a book with the same title as today's sermon, *Walking a Sacred Path*, by Lauren Artress. She wrote:

As I searched for a way to describe what walking the labyrinth can mean, literally and metaphorically, I remembered George MacDonald's fairy tale *The Princess and the Goblin*. A young princess is sent away from her father's kingdom, away from the world, to a castle of supposed safety. She begins to explore her new home and encounters an old woman spinning thread in the tower. The woman introduces herself as the princess's great-grandmother. She tells the princess that she has awaited her for years. In time, the great-grandmother gives the princess a ring to which she attached an invisible thread. This thread, the great-grandmother tells the princess, will guide her through the challenges she meets in life. The child is disappointed in her because she cannot see the thread or the ball that it comes from, which remain with the great-grandmother.

The author goes on to say:

This fairy tale captures a glimpse of what it is like to walk a sacred path. By following an invisible thread we connect to the Source, to the Sacred. We can't see it, and yet some deep part of us knows it is there. This innate awareness gives us solace and peace during stormy times. But it is difficult to find at first, even difficult to believe.

To walk a sacred path is to know and trust that there is guidance to help us live our lives on this planet. (*Walking a Sacred Path*, page 12)

Today you have the opportunity to walk the labyrinth and to experiencing the sacred path in a new way. It is an opportunity to connect with God, to ask for help, for comfort, for healing, for guidance and even for forgiveness. It is an opportunity to say, as King David said, "To you, O God, I lift my soul, my God in you I trust. It is an opportunity to say to the Holy Mystery, "here I am, take all that I am and lead me on the sacred path of life."