

If you have ever seen or walked a labyrinth, then you know that it is a prayer and meditation tool that looks a little like a giant brain and also a little like someone's lower intestines. You move through the path of a labyrinth to the center and then go back out. It is different from a maze, in that there are no choices, there is only one one circuitous path to the center and out again.

At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the center of your deepest self and back out into the world where you emerge with a broadened understanding of who you are. Or so reads the brochure.

The first time I walked a labyrinth I had to overcome some suspicion. (You can tell it was the early 90s.) It seemed kind of new age. But I came upon one once while praying and walking in the woods on Cape Cod. I wasn't really sure how to do it, but I didn't have any place else to be and there didn't seem to be anyone around to see me do it wrong....

I found a "start here" arrow and began a slow prayerful walk. I tried very hard to be open and to make room for seriously deep thoughts. As I moved through the path, thinking purposefully about the chapters of my life, which seemed the thing to do. I stopped before and after each dramatic turn, to take in my surroundings. The intestinal road flipped completely around before scrolling back in the opposite direction. So before each flip and right after, I stopped to take in what I was seeing. And then took note of what I was thinking about and feeling in terms of that chapter of my life. Transitions. Seasons of change. Pain and celebrations.

After about the third re-direct, my stops began to look familiar. Because of the layout of the path, I was starting to look at the same visual fields that I had visited previously. OK now I turn and there is that tree. That post. I can see that in the distance. and then it wraps around here and there is the red house. I was never in *exactly* the same spot physically, but was *very* close, just a step or two as a crow flies.

And then, the Epiphany -- At each pass, at each stopping place, I was looking at the same or very similar stuff, but *I* was not the same stuff. I had been changing both as I lived and as I walked. Let me pull that out.

First, I became aware that my life, the life I was thinking through while walking, was a series of joys and challenges which were not that distinct, one from another, but that each time I faced a categorically similar experience-- Fear. Uncertainty. Rejection. Celebration. Anticipation. Rejoicing-- I did so with the learnings of the previous experience in tow. God was changing me and so I had approached each new challenge with more information about who God is, more experience of God's faithful working in my life. Consequently the lag time between resistance and relinquishment of control was shrinking. I could see the arc of my formation. I got a brief glimpse of the puzzle box cover. This was Epiphany #1, that I wasn't going in circles and that God had been bringing me back into similar situations with the apparent target of a marked reduction in

the amount of time it took me to figure out that I was not in control. Not the boss. And that this is a good thing.

I love it when this happens in the Psalms. They start out complaining and fearful and yelling at God, but then they remember that one time when you took care of that thing, and then oh yea there was that other time when you rescued me and OK, so, I guess I can trust you and yea actually I can trust you and now that I think back I have to admit, you're really great God. Sorry for, you know, what I said. before. We're good, right? Praise the Lord. *Amen.*

The second part of that Epiphany was that as I prayerfully recalled my adventures in submission, I was being changed in real time *on that walk*, a change that I then took with me with a new head and heart into what in retrospect still ranks as the most acutely painful week of my life. Something was happening in between these turns. I was being re-minded of God's presence, work and character. The walk had become sacramental. God was moving in the remembering.

Its a primary way we have and have always had of being the people of God. We forget. We are re-minded and then God moves. We are changed in the process and moment of remembering.

In today's Gospel story Simon undergoes a similar transformation. Jesus is teaching a crowd and needs a more visible platform. He borrows a boat and Jesus asks Simon to put out a ways from shore. The fishermen were finished for the day. They were cleaning up, washing their nets when he appeared. Simon was happy to give over his boat for this purpose. When Jesus was through speaking, he asked Simon to put the nets back in.

We are told that there was some resistance but that Simon did yield, *Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.*

I love the image of them being washed up. Their nets were so fruitless that they were putting them away. Washing up at the end of the shift. No more to be done today.

At that moment, when their efforts had yielded nothing, this is the point when Jesus shows up and says, lets go fishing. Let's go and do what you just tried all night to do and yes, failed. Let's do it again. Let's row out deeper and drop the washed nets right here.

When the nets became so full they were seeming to break, others came over to assist. Two boats full and starting to sink, Simon falls on his knees and cries--go away from me I am a sinful man.

Most of us have been in this position at one time or another. Something in our world has broken. Maybe a lot of somethings. Repeated efforts to fix the somethings, are

eventually deemed wastes of time and energy. We concede defeat and declare ourselves washed up.

The good news from today's readings is that the *what I have tried is not working*, place, is the place from which true ministry flows. We admit that we have no idea how to face down a situation. And then both eventually and suddenly, we are pulling fish out of the water. God is using our truth, our journey, our failures and subsequent resurrections, to rescue and nourish others.

Today is the Annual Meeting. If ever there was a day for us to re-member. Today we face a number of elements in our visual field that ring bells, shall we say. It is an annual meeting. There is an annual report. We do this every year. This year we meet in a time of transition. A time of search. Again. It has been a while since the last search. But for some of you, this is merely another while among many. Saint Ann's is once again having to look seriously at her future, asking hard questions about money and aging membership. Again. Again with the how do we reach young families. Again with the what did we do wrong and who is going to fix it. And whose fault is it. This is not a new landscape, by any stretch of the imagination. None of it. Saint Ann's has been to all of these places before.

Here's the question--are we new? Can we think of places we have seen God's presence and mercy this year? During this rector's tenure? This assistant rector's? Have we been changed? As individuals in relationship with God and with one another?

It is a scary time and there is much at stake. You will have to work together to move from "Master we have worked all night," to "yet, if you say so." You will need to re-mind yourselves and each other of God's character and presence. Pray for another pray for this place.

And those of you who can access enough memory to be changed right now in the middle of this labyrinth walk, please, lead the rest of us. Let others see and hear you. Those of you who hold the humbling and incredible stories of God's work and presence in and through this place, I don't hold those stories, you do. A majority of them happened before I got here. Please, spirit historians, tell each other. Share the good news. Open your lips, that our mouths may proclaim God's Praise.

And then, thus humbled by our commonly renewed memory, let us together pull out into the deeper waters. God is here. God is moving. God loves Saint Ann's and all of the people in this area who have yet to be embraced by her loving care. Let the nets be dropped again, and let us together brace ourselves for a potentially back-breaking, net ripping, boat-sinking catch. *Amen.*

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