

I'm not sure what we looked like from the outside. From one perspective, it might have been a bunch of people wandering in all directions, bumping into each other on occasion. At first, it may have appeared that I was the Mother Duck with my flock following me blindly. No matter what it looked like from the outside, the Wednesday Education for Ministry class was on pilgrimage, thanks to Redeemer's wonderful labyrinth.

After we finished, we took some time to reflect on our "journey". I'll share what I experienced. You can talk with other members for their take, if you wish.

Before I began, I asked God to give me an idea for today. I also had the young people we are celebrating today on my mind. And, then there was the whole Thomas doubting thing. I just needed to walk it out. When I made my exit, I realized that the labyrinth was the perfect metaphor for life. (And, life is what we're celebrating with our young people this morning.)

We enter life many, many times during our time on earth. Not just at our birth, but also at transition times. There may have been people last Wednesday who didn't really want to walk the labyrinth. They did it anyway.

Sometimes, life asks you to participate in things you don't understand or don't want to understand. They were good doo-bees and walked anyway. Life often asks you to go where you are hesitant to go. So does God. Just go.

Labyrinths are not mazes. There are no hidden paths leading to nowhere. If you are paying attention, you can't get lost. I admit that I did get turned around once when I walked a labyrinth for the first time. I just retraced my steps and ended up where I began so I could start again. On occasion, life allows you a 'do-over'. God always does. There are many opportunities to begin anew. Take advantage of them.

The road can be straight or curvy. You can travel it fast or slow or somewhere in-between. Like the labyrinth that has one destination, life has an end as well. We all get there sooner or later. There will be times when you are on a straight-away and it is prudent to speed up a little. Just know that on those curves – you know, the times in your life when you face what you didn't expect – you need to slow down in order to keep yourself safe and sane. Slow down and trust God with the unexpected.

One of my favorite Labyrinth memories was of a little girl who was so excited to try it out. She and her mother went first. She skipped and danced through the whole thing. I wonder if she was singing “We’re off to see the Wizard” to herself!? She was so full of joy I couldn’t help feeling joyful myself.

As we get older and grow up, too many of us forget how to skip and dance. God loves dancing. Miriam danced with her tambourine. David danced as the ark came into the city. The Holy Trinity is often referred to as ‘a dance’. I’ll bet Jesus danced at that wedding in Cana. There are times when you should dance. It makes you smile. It makes God smile. (And, you’ll either make others smile by your joy or by being so hilarious that you’ll make them laugh!)

Some of us like to journey on our own. Others need a crowd. Walking the labyrinth with others is a reminder that even the most introverted among us needs community. Last year, when I did my pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine, I learned how important it was having others around. The call came early in the morning on Wednesday (it was still Tuesday in Indiana) that my dad’s earthly journey was done.

He'd won our last contest – he got to the New Jerusalem before I got to the Old one. (Dad and I were quite competitive.) Everyone was very kind. They gave me space, but they also were there with a hug when I needed one. Life requires that you learn to let people be on their path, but be nearby just in case. God gives us community in which to learn it.

As I passed by my fellow walkers on the labyrinth, I realized how much I'd been learning from them in class. People often don't expect to learn from others. Yet, everyone has something to teach others about. I discovered that by listening to people tell their stories. My dad taught me a lesson also. As competitive as we were, he never let me win – even when I was a kid. I had to earn that Chutes and Ladders victory, by golly. I wasn't going to get special treatment because I was a girl or because I was cute (this was a long time ago) or because I just was being bossy and wanted my own way. I had to earn every victory and learn to accept defeat.

As I've gotten older, realizing that God wins in the end makes it much easier to not get so worried about winning in the first place. Believe me, enjoying the game is as valuable as winning it.

I left the labyrinth and took a minute to come back to real time. When you have walked on holy ground, you need time to re-enter the world. Leaving reminded me how much my soul's health depends on making regular visits to holy, sacred space. Going to holy space doesn't take you out of this world as much as it re-centers you in it.

Time with God reminds you who you belong to and who loves you without ceasing. Being with others in sacred space reminds you that you don't travel this journey alone. Don't forget that life's journeys often require time for reflection and the caring of and caring for others who join you on the way.

I hope you all will take advantage of that wonderful gift we have outside sometime. Whether it's by yourself, or with a group on a summer Monday night, a labyrinth pilgrimage provides holy space for you to discover God, discover life, discover yourself.