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Exodus 3:1-5, 13-14

Romans 5:1-5

Lectio Divina Life: "Shimmering"

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Because of the way I live my life, I feel sometimes like I should start by saying – Hi, I'm Lynn and I am addicted to goal setting and planning." That was until sabbatical.

As I was preparing for sabbatical, I spoke with my clergy peer support group about my many plans and goals, and they said to me, "I should lectio divina life instead." I smiled nicely, and then thought in my head, "Yeah, right. After 22 years of us meeting together every three weeks, you don't know me better than that!"

Then, I had a meeting with the Associate Conference Minister, Sharon Morris in which I was asking for help with my sabbatical church project: financial solvency for St. James and she told me she thought I was putting the cart before the horse and that we would benefit from doing a five-year plan using a process designed by the UCC and that could wait till sabbatical was done. Then she said, "I hear you've been sick this last year, and thus I think you should just rest for sabbatical.

So, off I went on January first with the only plan and goal being to "lectio divina (meaning: divine reading) of life.

Christine Valters Paintner (both a contemplative and artist, who is abbess of the online monastic community "Abbey of the Arts" describes the four movements of lectio divina this way:
Look for what is shimmering,
then go about savoring it,

then pay attention for what it is summoning you to do.
And then end by being about stilling.
I have used this pattern for reading scripture for years, but
never done it amidst my everyday life - all day, until sabbatical.

For three months I wore a bracelet and even now continue to
wear that reads in my own handwriting: shimmering, savoring,
summoning, stilling. These four movements (though labeled
using other words) go back in Christianity to the 12th century.

Today, I would like to share what I have experienced and
learned about shimmering during sabbatical. So, I left St. James
stepping out into the world for the subsequent 90 days with
the words from the poem "What to Remember When Walking"
by David Whyte that reads, "What you can plan is too small for
you to live."

The first movement of lectio divina is the awakening of your
body, mind and heart to God's presence, and a listening for
God's voice; in other words, reverential listening; the attuning
of our ears, eyes, hands and feet to the revelations of God.

The four movements of lectio divina make the following
assumptions which prompts us to quiet ourselves to receive
Mystery. They assumptions are: God is active and present to
us. It is a response to all the ways God whispers (and
sometimes shouts) to us through the world.

In the reverential listening we wrap ourselves around it and
allow it to become enfleshed within us. In reverential listening
life becomes more expansive and we discover the layers of
possibility present to us. Reverential listening requires that we
have patience and release our expectations of what will
happen and even our goals.

Life is cumulative and thus I entered my first sabbatical in 33 years of ministry with deep gratitude (for you are the only church who has given me a sabbatical) and a sense of the weight of 33 years of seeing, feeling, and helping carry the weight of people's sadness, grief, loss and suffering. I was bone weary of sickness, addiction, and death.

Then, two weeks before sabbatical was to begin, I got a letter from a dear friend who helped me survive my first 10 years of ordained ministry – she informed me she is terminally ill. Thus began, a several day trip in Atlanta to be with her for a bit and weekly and sometimes several times a week conversations since then.

Add to that, the truth of my own health over the last 18 months. I carry two chronic conditions that contain lots of pain and fatigue. I had hoped when stress was reduced and my schedule more free, I would see a significant decrease in the both pain and fatigue. I received neither. What has been for a year and a half is my new normal. My heart and mind have been rejuvenated and refreshed, “yes, indeed” during sabbatical! Though my body has not been.

I thought only beauty would be shimmering during sabbatical. Instead suffering wound up being so glaring, it stopped me in my tracks.

In my 90 days of sabbatical, I could not avoid suffering – mine or others.

Upon returning from sabbatical on Day 1 – Monday, I heard one of our members was suffering. She was once again put on hospice. On Wednesday, I met with her and her family. She

was unresponsive, but looked peaceful. Yet, her family was suffering in the face of the impending loss of her. She met the Lord face to face on Thursday, and now is whole and pain free. Yet, I am well aware the pain her family feels due to the loss of her physical presence.

In your last 90 days you have probably been unable to avoid suffering either – yours or someone else’s or the world’s. And lest any of us forget, this is Lent and Holy Week is around the corner – reminding us that suffering and the Holy go together. They are not separate!

In the last week of sabbatical, I read the newest book of Richard Rohr’s entitled, The Universal Christ in which he writes, “Why would humans recalibrate, reset or change course other than for great love and great suffering.”

I don’t know about you, but I usually maintain the status quo until great love or great suffering rocks my world. Thus, I think Richard Rohr is right. These two things do cause us to recalibrate, reset or change. They cannot be dealt with nonchalantly. Rather, they shake us at our very core, and we can be better as a result of great love (of course) and because of great suffering (too)!

My hope and prayer for my time of sabbatical was not just renewal (a return to what was), but for transformation as well. And I got what I prayed for via great suffering (mine, others and the world’s) and through great love (more about that next week when we deal with the second movement when we lection divina life: “savoring”).

I don’t know about you, but I want to move ever closer to wholeness, and dig and live at a deep level and not merely

scratch and glide on the surface – suffering has helped me do this, and it can do the same for us all.

As I ended my 90 days of sabbatical, in my heart and mind were and are the words of the poet Hafiz in his work, “Now Is the Time” that reads,

“Now is the time for the world to know
That every thought and action is sacred.
This is the time for you to compute the impossibility
That there is anything
But Grace.

Now is the season to know
That everything you do
is sacred.”