

“Second Journey,” 25 April 2010

The title of this morning's message/service is second journey, and that name really came from a book by Joan Anderson entitled *The Second Journey*. It turns out that she wrote the book when she was about the same age I am now, and so what she had to say really resonated with me, especially as she described what she meant by the term “second journey.” This is how she put it: “Second journeys demand that one move away from the familiar...It is a decision to end stagnation and become more generative—to eventually feel as though one is reborn, that one's life is finally freshly beginning again. Strange as it seems, an end always create a beginning.”

In some ways I'm going on both an actual second journey, and a symbolic one as well. As some of you know, The Garden has received a grant from Lilly Endowment that allows me to do some personal reflection and experience some things I otherwise wouldn't be able to do, and it offers similar kinds of experiences for The Garden. One sense in which this is a second journey is that this is the second such grant we have received because of Lilly's generosity, and it's a second opportunity for all of us to reflect on future possibilities.

If you'll indulge me, I'd like to share with you briefly how I will be spending the three plus months I'll be away, and then also our hopes and intentions for The Garden during the same time period. My leave time is divided into basically three segments. The first centers on a new-found interest in Celtic Spirituality, so I'll be spending time in Ireland and Scotland exploring its roots, and hopefully experiencing God's presence in new and fresh ways.

The second and third segments really focus on what it means to be “generative,” or as Joan Anderson put it, to experience the sense of being reborn and renewed. During part of that time, my family, including our daughter, son-in-law and granddaughter, will be traveling around Lake Michigan in an RV. I know that may sound a bit surprising to some of you, but we have some history of camping and some

really fond memories both of our growing up days, and of some of the experiences our daughter had with her grandparents, so we're hopeful of creating some nuggets of special memories for our granddaughter. In addition, of course, we will have the chance to spend valuable time with her, and hopefully grow even closer to her, our family, and to God.

The third segment of the journey will be spent in Colorado, and it will be time when I am mostly alone, doing some personal reflection. Part of what I will be trying to discern is what my future might be once my active days of ministry are over. Now, as I've said before, that's still some years away, but I really believe it's important to do some thinking and planning, so that time will involve prayer, reading, writing and deeper introspection than I usually have time to do.

During the time I'll be gone, The Garden will have some wonderful opportunities to experience speakers who will share some of their life's journeys and continue to help Gardeners connect with God in significant ways. In addition, there will be occasions for getting together to learn more about The Garden, and to begin to explore how The Garden might continue to grow and flourish in the years ahead. Once I return, we'll spend time together carving out what our future work will be, so that we continue to thrive.

One thing is clear: we will be on a journey—all of us. And it will hopefully be as meaningful a journey as that the two disciples experienced in our Bible passage. This is the story of something that happened the day we call Easter, and it's only told in detail in the Gospel of Luke.

Let me give a little context to the story. It occurs after the death of Jesus and after some reports that his presence has been felt and experienced again. The two who are walking the road are called “followers,” and one is named Cleopas; we don't know the name of the other. We're told that the two were walking toward the village of Emmaus about seven miles from Jerusalem, and it is in the course of that walk, that journey, that their spiritual lives come alive again in a whole new way.

I see their walk to Emmaus as a parallel experience to what it means for you and me to be on a spiritual journey. As I've said before, life is a continual journey that involves growing, changing, evolving and learning, and it is only in the process of the journey that we come to discover what life is all about. I'm not sure we ever totally arrive; we're never finished. All of life is a journey of discovery, a process of learning who we are, trying to figure out how God would have us live, and then trying to align our lives to be true to that kind of life.

One of the things I notice in the Bible passage that applies to our own spiritual journey is that we don't have to go it alone. The two men are walking together; they're not walking separately from one another, but together they're processing everything that has happened, and trying to make sense of it all. Our spiritual journey, like our whole life journey, does not happen in isolation from others, but in and through our connections with each other.

I think that's an important thing to remember when it comes to our own spiritual journey. Trying to make the trek through life alone can make for a long, hard journey. It's much easier to have a sidekick to walk along with us. That's one of the reasons it's important for us to gather each week—to get renewed, inspired and regenerated, so we can keep on the journey. It helps us grow spiritually when there are people who challenge us and encourage us, and you'll find many of those people here at The Garden this summer.

There's another thing I notice about the Bible passage, and that's what a friend of mine calls "God-cidences." God-cidences are occurrences that come to us in some surprising and unexpected ways, and they can occur at any point along the journey. The two in the Bible passage suddenly found themselves in the company of a complete stranger, or so they thought, but this stranger gave them some interesting insights and perspectives about what they had been through. Those insights were so powerful that the two in the Bible story say, "Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when he talked to us on the road?" That's a God-cidence.

God-cidences happen in a variety of ways. They can occur in a totally unexpected moment when we feel overwhelmed by God's love for us. We can experience them in the hug of a friend, in a note or phone call that arrives at just the right moment. God-cidences may seem to be quite ordinary and happen in the middle of an ordinary day or in the midst of some of our normal routines, but those moments renew us and keep us centered, and are little gifts from God.

There's yet one more thing I notice in the Bible passage that might help us along our journey, and that is the need to nourish our spiritual lives. The two men got to the village and they got something to eat; it was in the sharing of the meal that they had a sense of revelation and insight.

Just as our bodies need nutrients to grow and develop and be at its best, so, too, does our soul. We need to find the soul food that helps us discover and uncover what God has in mind for us. I know one of the things that helps me grow spiritually is reading, and that's what I'll be doing a lot of in the next few months! There are many good books out there that feed us spiritually and help us along the way, so if we enjoy reading, that's one way that can help feed our spirits.

Prayer and meditation are other ways to nourish our spirits as we journey through life. I don't believe there's a right or wrong way to pray; prayer is simply conversation with God. It's two-way, and involves both sharing with God, and listening for God to respond. The most important thing is that we make time in our busy schedules to connect with God. Prayer is a time to share our frustrations and struggles and to be totally honest about where we are. It's a time to listen for something that just might be an answer to our dilemma. We have to take the time to be still, to reflect, or let our minds wander and our hearts listen. It's then that we may get an idea that hadn't occurred to us before, or feel the nudge to do something or try something that we hadn't considered before. The point is that we have to take time to nourish our spirits as we make the journey of life.

The reality is that each of us is on this journey. As Marianne Williamson put it, "The

spiritual path...is simply the journey of living our lives. Everyone is on a spiritual path; most people just don't know it." Maybe today we've had a chance to become a bit more aware of our own spiritual path, and maybe we can even relate to something the French priest and philosopher Teilhard de Chardin once said: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." More and more, I've come to believe that's true. So, enjoy the journey. Bon Voyage!