

Walking in the Light
Bob Stillerman
All Saints Sunday, 11/6/2022
Luke 6:20-31



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On Wednesday night, we held a candlelit All Saints/Souls walk in the labyrinth. Ed facilitated the walk for us, and one of the things he did was to place candles at each turn in the path. We also had small hand-held candles to help guide our steps.

We began our walk about 6:30, and it was amazing how quickly night set in – before we knew it, the once-bright space was dark, and unhindered by artificial light pollution. Add to that the coverage of the tree canopy, and overcast skies, and our visibility disappeared rapidly. It was also a little windy, and my candle was kind of puny, and its wick had seen better days. With each wind gust, my immediate light was reduced to a sliver. It was hard to see a foot in front of me, let alone read the words of my song-sheet.

I have been on our labyrinth hundreds, maybe even thousands of times, and I've walked it dozens of times. I've also swept it, blown it, taken photographs of it, planned and led worship events on it, planted and watered its vegetation, and chased my little girls around its path. I've even napped on its benches, and enjoyed picnic breakfasts on its cool stones. All of this is to say that it's a space I am intimately familiar with.

But add in darkness, and my familiarity, my confidence, my comfort wanes. I don't have control of this path. These are unfamiliar waters. The space between each candle is lonely, deserted, and foreign.

If I am honest with you, I didn't expect our walk to be a useful illustration of today's text. But wow, is it ever!

Let's imagine the perimeter of our labyrinth is the world. And there are too many times when our world feels dark, and heavy, and unfamiliar.

In this morning's text, the author of Luke's gospel offers us four universal human conditions in their rendition of the beatitudes. You might call them symptoms of a dark, heavy, and unfamiliar world.

I realize there's an economic slant to the author's version, but everyone's been poor. Even the wealthy have been poor in something. If not cashflow, it could be

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resources like time, or energy, or labor, or something less tangible: love, friendship, joy, happiness.

And name me someone who hasn't longed for nourishment of the body or soul, at least temporarily. And name me someone who hasn't lost something or somebody that still pains them, at least temporarily. And name me someone, who hasn't been excluded from community, or at least been made to feel excluded from community, in some small way.

Name me somebody who's never felt poor, or hungry, or burdened by the weight of grief, or the loneliness of isolation. We have all stood inside a dark, heavy, and unfamiliar perimeter.

And yet Jesus says, this sense of alienation, or loss, or hunger, or deprivation is only temporary. God's community, and fulfillment, and laughter, and divine communion await. Not conditionally. Not maybe. But soon. In God's realm.

Yes, the labyrinth gave us a peek at the darkness of the world on Wednesday, but it also revealed glimpses of a light-filled future.

Yes, I walk this labyrinth in darkness, and there are points where I am alone on unfamiliar stones. But when my feet near each turn, a small candle beams out generous light. I am guided. I know which way to go. I sense my surroundings again, even if only for a moment. And I know the truth of this place. The volley of comfort and discomfort, familiarity and unfamiliarity continues as the path unfolds into the center.

Lasting, certain, grace-filled community, wholeness, laughter, and divine communion await. Because that's who God is. And that's the long-term world God makes for God's children.

The condition we're in now is gonna give way to something unconditional: A world where people love God and neighbor as they love themselves.

I find this passage extremely fitting for All Saints Sunday. Because, let me tell you, here in the present, whether on a labyrinth, or a square, or in my living room, or

even right here in this pulpit, sometimes I do feel anxious, and sometimes I do feel poor, and sometimes I do feel like I don't belong, and sometimes I do feel loss, and I grieve for friends who are no longer here, or for opportunities squandered, or for shortcomings I wish I could amend.

Luke's gospel isn't a fairy tale. It doesn't claim that God will erase the circumstances of the present. Rather, it says that our present will one day morph into God's future. Not because of our self-appointed righteousness, not because of what we've earned, not because of some invisible economic hand swaying us toward correction. God's future will burst forth into the present because that's just who God is.

Back to the labyrinth. In the center, I am surrounded by a perimeter of two dozen candles. Their flames seem to lap up the inky blackness of the night. The candles do not eliminate the darkness, but they refuse to let the darkness be the only thing that occupies this space. The beauty, the safety, the centrality, the unity, the mystery of God, all represented by the labyrinth cannot, will not be hidden by darkness. Because ours is a world of light; light that shines even in darkness.

Friends, we needn't walk a labyrinth to remember that we have candles burning in this place. The women and men we honor today, experienced the same conditions of which we speak. And while, like us, they lived in a transactional economy, they chose to put their faith in a divine economy. That is to say, they offered charity, regardless of how it affected their ledger; they invited us to their tables, filling us with food, and conversation, and friendship; they recognized our grief, and offered us a ministry of presence in a broken present; they determined that a community is made more vibrant, not by the wealth or social status that one brings, but instead by one's existence as a created child of God. They weren't managing debits and credits to be sorted on some final balance sheet; they were creating a new community valued in inexhaustible love; filled with inexhaustible manna; undergirded with inexhaustible hope.

Our present is morphing into God's future, because the saints have been active stewards of God's future in the present. That is, because they loved God and loved us, God's world is ever closer. And if we look hard enough, we'll see their

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light shining through the darkness of a world that appears dark, and heavy, and unfamiliar.

Good friends, may embrace their light in order that we, too, may be light for the world. Amen.