

## The Reluctant Pilgrim: Coming Home

It has been a journey this week, a journey from deep burning, the burning of one who was unsatisfied sitting on the hillside tending sheep. It has been a journey through stranger to friend and friend to stranger, a journey where we have glimpsed the smile of God in the cave of silence, and have heard the voices of the Divine in the ancient mentors and in our memory of music.

But it sits me to go home. It is time to move on. It is time to lean toward that which accepts and embraces us for who we are. It is time to move ahead and to find a place to sit for a while. But it's not always easy to leave the road. Some of us are going to have a hard time leaving here to go home.

I've been wandering for seven years in my journey of faith. I have had the fortune of having ancient pilgrims teach me. I have glimpsed an occasional glimpse of God but never God's face, just occasionally the backside of God. And I have limped from table to table, from silence to silence, from song to song, seeking my name and hearing my new name.

But we do have to go home. The only problem is it's just hard to figure out where home is. It's hard to go back, because home isn't what it was when we left. Even if we have been gone but a week on a pilgrimage to Chatauqua, home is not what it was. Everyone there has been pursuing the dailyness of their lives, sometimes drudgery, sometimes fear. They have all been touched and changed by the week that's passed. Home isn't what it used to be, but then, neither are you. We are different, too, for every pilgrimage we take changes us; and the strangers we meet bless us; and the songs that we learn to sing, the people at home haven't yet heard. It is hard to go home.

It is hard to go home, because on the pilgrimage of faith, one of the things that happens is we discover the truth, another piece of truth about life, another piece of truth that we might not have seen when we were living in the familiarity of that space before we left to discover the deeper truth in which God continues to reveal God's self.

Annie Dillard, one of my companions on this journey, helped me see what it was that I was discovering on the road when she talked in her book on *Pilgrim at Tinker*

*Creek* about the fact that in a certain sense, only the newborn in this world are whole. She says that as adults, we are expected to be, and necessarily are, somewhat nibbled. Everything that lives is sliced and scarred. The butterflies have their wings notched. Grasshoppers have their legs broken off. Sharks are scarred, and there are worms in their hearts.

Because our eyes have had the scales burned from them, and our ears have had the cotton taken out, we have seen and heard the truth of this life. We have come to know that it is the nature of existence to be nibbled and have come to believe that just maybe it is not a deterrent to life, but it is indeed the very character of life.

When I read Annie Dillard's description, I could not help but be moved back to the place that is the center of my own life and actually is the place of my own home. As a member of the congregations, the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, the center of our life is what we call The Lord's Table, and it is a table on which there is every week broken bread and a cup of wine to remind us that the center of our life is one who was broken and poured out. And when I read that we are all as human beings nibbled, I understood why that place at that table was my home, because it is the one place to which I go each week where I am reminded of what home is.

Home is where I can take my nibbled, and broken, and fractured self and participate in a banquet that has been set by a broken and wounded God. Home is where I meet the Creator and the One who defines me, and the table is where I not only meet God in that broken bread and that cup, but I meet God in the broken lives of all of those who have dared to break their lives and give them to me at that table.

Maybe this is really what home is all about is going back to the place where we have always been, and finding that in that brokenness, we glimpse God. But it is more than that, for the table at which I sit each week, where bread is broken and wine is poured is a table where I am accepted in my brokenness, where I am forgiven for not being whole, and where I learn to forgive others for not being whole. It is a table of grace. And in this pilgrimage toward the Divine, one of the critical pieces is to discover that we are forgiven.

I have a friend whose father died, and he's had a hard time with the death of his father. For two years he has struggled to try to determine why it is that he has wrestled

with his father's ghosts. And finally, he said to me one day, he said, "I now know why I can't move on in my life. It is because I have not forgiven my father for not being what I wanted him to be."

The spiritual journey of grace is the one where we learn to forgive the past for not being what we wanted it to be, and to forgive the present for not being what we need it to be, and to forgive our own psyche for not giving us all the strength that we think we have to be, and indeed it is forgiving the future for it will never be all that we want it to be. To be able to walk and to live into tomorrow is to be able to forgive for not having what we want.

The journey toward home is one where we have discovered that life is broken and nibbled, and that in order to live, we must forgive. But there is one other thing which is central to an understanding of going home. Jesus met with his disciples at the night when he was most at home. The night when he was preparing to leave them, he sat with them, and he broke the bread, and he gave it to them, and he said, "This is me, broken." He gave them a cup and said, "This is me, poured out, life poured out."

The sanctity of life is experienced when broken human beings dare to give their brokenness to each other. The only way you can give life is for it to be broken. You can't give anything whole. Everyday is the breaking of your life into one more piece. The only way you can give your life is to break it day after day, and then to give it in community to somebody else. That's what a sacred place is. It is where people have been willing to take their broken lives, and in love and courage, give them to someone else.

It is not easy to give our broken lives, because a lot of people don't want it. One of the things I've discovered on this particular journey of my life is there are a lot of churches who do not want our broken lives. I can't tell you how many times I've gone to church, and what they want – what they want is my wholeness. What they want is the strength of my life. What they want is that which I have that's good to give. They want my money. They want my power. They want my song.

But, friends, when you go to worship, and you do not have a song; and when you are so broken that there is no voice left to sing; and when the words you once spoke are empty, and hollow, and shattered at your feet, you still have something to give. The

communities of faith which learn how to receive our tears are the ones who will receive our laughter and our joy. The friends that we know, the friends who sustain us are not simply the ones with whom we rejoice in our lives, but they are the ones who receive our tears. We give our lives, and in giving our lives, we discover God.

The reluctant pilgrim who moves from home to home, who the wrestling with divine strangers and friends, in the struggle with memory and emptiness, is one who goes home limping. And home is where we can give our wounded and limping selves to others, and they will receive it even if they don't understand it, and even if it makes them uncomfortable. Home is where we sit at table with other nibbled people.

I was at the Park Avenue Christian Church on Ash Wednesday, New York City, having been to the center of the collapse of the World Trade Center, and as our speaker yesterday said, at the center of the collapse of the previous world that we had known. I soaked up the city's power and its pain, its glory and its agony. I had seen its faith and its fear in the faces of those who walk the streets with ashes on their heads.

Suzanne Webb who was then the minister of the Park Avenue church imposed ashes on my head that night, and in her reflection she quoted Canadian Leonard Cohen, a song I did not know, but now a song that is a new song that guides me in my heart.

“You can add up the parts, but you don't have sum.

You can strike up the march, there is no drum.

Every heart to love will come, but like a refugee.

So ring the bells that still can ring.

Forget your perfect offering.

There's a crack in everything.

That's how light gets in.”

Welcome home where cracked bells can still ring. Welcome to the table of grace where a burned and frightened Moses can sit, where grieving and witnessing Mary can sit, where a Jacob with his wounded hip can sit on his donut ring, where an Elijah stares a silent stare into sacred hope, and where Mary hums her Hannah song. Welcome to where a broken and wounded Jesus offers himself as a glimpse of dawn.