



Easter Devotional Activity (5A)

Week of 10 May 2020

Walking as Prayer

Scripture:

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:1-7)

Reflection:

This week's gospel text points us toward the heart and mind of God, which is the fullness of love for all. Jesus reassures us that he goes before us, preparing a way for us. Despite any challenge or uncertainty that may be ahead of us, we can put our full confidence in the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. We do not walk alone! We can bring to mind the beautiful experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when the risen Jesus accompanied them as they walked and talked along their journey. In hindsight, they realized that their "hearts were burning within."

At the close of Sunday's worship, we were sent forth into our week with this prayer:

You set before us a way, gracious God. Send us forth to walk it.

You speak the truth to us. Send us forth to embody it.

You promise us life. Send us forth fully alive, able to give ourselves away in the name of Jesus Christ, our way, our truth, our life. Amen.

Jesus, who shows us the way, who speaks truth, who gives us life, is inviting us into a deepened relationship of trust and love. **This week's devotional activity is an invitation to explore walking as prayer**, a spiritual practice that connects our body's physical movement and breathing with an attentiveness to God's presence with us.

For most of us, walking is a basic, daily function. Often without much thought, we put one foot in front of the other, making our way from place to place. Some of us may walk for exercise or for a change of scenery during this time of home confinement. Yet, walking as prayer can become a fulfilling spiritual practice that deepens our connection to God as well. As with other contemplative prayer practices, we are invited into a greater awareness of the physical body, as we take steps and as we breathe in and out. As one's steps and breaths synchronize, the mind becomes more open to the divine presence in the moment. There are many ways to practice walking prayer – a couple of suggestions are offered here.

Walking Prayer as a solitary practice

Select a favorite scripture verse, a refrain from a hymn that is meaningful to you, or use a breath prayer (*as outlined in Easter Week 3A's devotional*). As you walk, notice the cadence of your footsteps. Breathe in and out slowly and deeply, repeating the phrase or refrain within the rhythms of your body's movement. Keep yourself present in the moment and allow your mind to become silent. As other thoughts arise, let them go, and re-center your focus onto your chosen phrase. You are creating a free, open space that is receptive to God's presence. As your thoughts slow down, what do you notice differently around you? How do you see God's love expressed in your surroundings? How do you feel Christ's assuring presence walking with you? At the end of your walk, what spiritual insight may be emerging?

Walking Prayer as a shared practice

Walking prayerfully with others encourages spiritual conversation that deepens our connections to each other and to God, as together we focus on the divine presence in the current moment.

Set aside time as family to take a prayer walk. Introduce it as a time to observe and talk together about the many ways that we can see God at work in the world around us. You may decide to collect items along the way that are meaningful (such as fallen leaves, if appropriate), or take photos where you find evidence of God's work. Talk as well about how God has so beautifully and creatively designed each of our bodies, which allow us to experience the world. Talk about specific examples, such as our ability to walk/ run/ play sports, see things, feel the breeze, listen to sounds, and so on. Upon your return, make a gratitude list of what was discovered on the walk and offer a prayer of thanks to God.

Spiritual practices such as Walking Prayer invite us to a more reflective, thoughtful way of life. The everyday action of walking can become a channel of God's grace, through which we glimpse the depth of God's love and care. Are there other ways you can incorporate prayer into the physical activities of your day?

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