

Kairos Reflection

Discipline: How do we stay focused in our faith journey?

October 17, 2021



Reading 1 - Genesis 1:1-13

Reading 2

“Inspired by a fifth-century conversation between Zi Zhang and Confucius about the practices of wise rulers in *The Analects*, here are five excellent practices for travelers on sacred journeys:

Practice the arts of attention and listening.

Practice renewing yourself every day.

Practice meandering toward the center of every place.

Practice the ritual of reading sacred texts.

Practice gratitude and praise-singing.”

— Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*



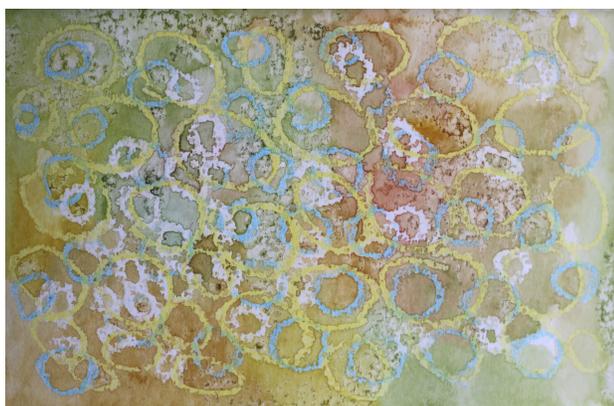
It was nearing dark, rain droplets trickling down the windows as the train chugged deeper and deeper into the French countryside with me still on it. That is not where I intended to be. According to my carefully calculated itinerary, I should have gotten off at the last stop! And I had been ready at the exit for Maconville. There had just been one small but significant obstacle that changed my course: I could not for the life of me figure out how to open the door. Now I was lost, equipped only with a dying cell phone, maybe survival French vocabulary, and no back-up plan. But I am forever indebted to the nice lady who helped me reorient myself. She told me to get off at the next stop and take the bus in the opposite direction. When it was time, she even demonstrated how to open the door. With her help and divine intervention, I managed to find my way to the tiny town of Taize, France, which is the kind of place that most people have never heard of before, yet has deep significance for those who have. The goal of this ecumenical community is to promote a culture of simplicity, kindness, and reconciliation. The week-long meetings provide an opportunity to cultivate authentic relationships between young people from around the world. Somehow I still made it in time for evening prayer that first day, albeit exhausted and with soggy shoes. The flickering candles and words of “Jesu le christ” rising from the voices of thousands of young people filled me with a sense of peace and reminded me that detours work out in the end.



Tonight, we are reflecting on the question “Discipline: How do we stay focused in our faith journey?” I admit that when I looked up the word “discipline” in the dictionary, I found the definition inconsistent with how I conceptualize journeys like the one to Taize. The connotation of “control gained by enforcing obedience” and “training that corrects, molds, or perfects” would make anyone scared to even embark on the journey for fear of not being able to open the door. Discipline implies an end goal of maintaining order, subduing chaos, and reaching a standard of perfection. This goal feels unattainable, and is it really what we want?

Or more importantly, what God wants?

I think the word practice, as the continuous, habitual process of reorienting ourselves, is a more sustainable way to engage with the journey of life. One of the key differences between discipline and practice is that practice allows - even calls us - to feel lost sometimes. When I approached my journey to Taize as a practice, rather than a discipline, I was able to learn from my mistakes, embarrassments and detours and trust that at each moment I was where I needed to be. Even when I felt geographically disoriented, God opened another door, through the kindness of a stranger along the way.



In our first reading for tonight, Phil Cousineau offers some spiritual practices that can help keep us grounded and connected with the holy in our daily lives, especially at these times when we feel adrift. These practices cultivate engagement with our surroundings that then translate into actions, actions that realize God's kingdom on earth. First, we must be listeners and let the journey be our guide, constantly asking ourselves, what can I learn from this moment? How is God speaking to me? Second, the practice of meandering towards a center helps us remember that it is okay to not know exactly where we are headed: What's important is that we are keeping a love of God and a love of neighbor at that center of all we do. Third, gratitude and singing songs of praise can help us to find strength in the beautiful moments. Fourth, reading sacred scripture grounds us in our tradition, which calls us to respond to the deep needs of the world around us, to grapple with the ground we walk on, the systems we operate under, and the inner landscapes of our hearts in all their complexities. Finally, renewing ourselves each day reminds us that the journey is both contemplative and active. Taking time to rest, slow down, and simply be gives us the endurance to continue doing the hard work, to continue walking along the path that God calls us to each day. These practices teach us to wander intentionally; they are the art of pilgrimage.

Showing up for these practices help us orient our lives towards God's will and live life as pilgrimage, in which the practices we engage with along the way matter as much as the destination. Traditionally, pilgrimages include journeys to sacred sites, often as an act of reconciliation, but I like to think of pilgrimage beyond geographic displacements: broadly as a physical journey that prompts spiritual growth. Participating in pilgrimage connects us with the people who have walked before us, our current neighbors, and those who will follow in our footsteps. This interconnectedness reminds us that the journey we walk is one we in part help shape, even when we don't know exactly where it will lead or what the future destination will look like. Ultimately, pilgrimage and the spiritual practices it encompasses help us live in Kairos time, where each moment is the opportune one to encounter and do the will of God.

Pilgrimage as practice for the spiritual life has helped me live Kairos time in my faith and my art-making - the technical name of my major is even Visual and Media Arts *Practice*. As an artist, my

practice is as much about how I engage intentionally with communities and the journey of life as it is about making paintings. Throughout the last four years, I have been grateful for opportunities to practice pilgrimage at places like Taize that have illuminated the connection between art and faith as spiritual practices. When I was in the church for evening prayer that first night, the songs nourished as my crayons danced across the pages of my sketchbook. I realized we called to be co-creators with God and that the creative process itself is a pilgrimage filled with unexpected discoveries...and a perpetual sense of being lost. If you've asked me how my art project is going this semester, you know it's been evolving rapidly in ways I could not have imagined. "We'll see where it goes," is my most common phrase. This semester, I've allowed myself to get lost in the journey, which turns out to be where we can find new creative possibilities.

In tonight's second reading, we see that God also has daily creative and spiritual practices of pilgrimage. The Bible begins with God showing up each day to create the world. Imagine how God must have felt to see light twinkling across the darkness, water dancing between the rocks, and bunnies hopping through the golden chrysanthemums for the first time. Excitement, yes, but probably also some sense of disorientation at suddenly existing in relation to a physical world...How did God respond to the experience of being lost, encountering the unfamiliar for the first time? God responds as a pilgrim, with a repeated practice of gratitude: Each day, God pauses to notice that it was good. Perhaps when we are moving through our lives, we can emulate God's awe-filled humility and let this pilgrim practice of gratitude move us to action. Even in the rough patches, when we feel disoriented by the harrowing future or just plain lost, we have an opportunity to be grateful for this particular temporal and geographic space of the journey, to remember that we are co-pilgrims with God along this path, trying to co-create a more just future through our meanderings.

Whether working through a seemingly impossible homework problem, trying to organize a church service with many different people, planning a volunteer event, or practicing for an upcoming performance, we have many opportunities to use our creative and spiritual energies to engage deeply with the many interconnected journeys of our daily lives. The creative, spiritual, and physical practice of continuously committing ourselves to the pilgrimage journey--it is messy sometimes. Like my

journey through the French countryside, we will get lost and a bit soggy...and like my adventures in art-making, we may get paint splattered on everything. But, ultimately, it's a humble journey of discovery that's worth getting lost for.

