

Journeys, Detours, Waystations

Lake Street Church of Evanston

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One of the things that always interested me about the story of the magi is that in almost all depictions, its just 3 guys holding some gifts. The reality is that the text never actually says the number of the magi, just that they brought 3 gifts. In Eastern Orthodoxy, there are traditionally 12 wise men. They even get names. Their gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh refer to events in Jesus' life and are symbolic. All that's to say, we think about 3 people with 3 gifts, but of course the logistics of the journey are much greater, and there might have been an astounding number of folks in their supply train. 2000 years later we boil it down to 3 people on camels, when in reality, if it did happen, it was something different. And of course, the magi were not gathered around a manger, either, they came when Jesus was a toddler, and gave him these strange gifts that I, frankly, could not imagine giving my toddler to play with. And so, we see that after the fact, the great journey of the magi is something different than what actually happened, or at least it is in the popular imagination. And I want to use that thought – the journey is a creature of the present, and that when it becomes the past, the meaning, trials, and weaving of it may change, to talk about our spiritual lives a little bit this morning.

The truth that I have come to realize is that meaning making tends to happen on a couple of different levels – we make meaning when we're going through a part of our journey, in the present, but we also are always revisiting that same present to make meaning out of it again, and that meaning, that second meaning making about our spiritual and experiential journeys, never really ceases. Those experiences are always there to re-hashed, re-considered, and given new life in our present lives. I don't think we ever really get back to the raw data of those experiences, but we get what we need to out of it, and we make meaning anyway.

In our spiritual lives, many of us journey far – we entertain theologies and a-theologies that seem far away from our religious upbringing. Some of us hold views about the divine that would have seemed unreasonable to us even 5 years before. My experience is that the views that I held 5 years before are in many ways the same as they are now, but also very different, and I don't think I would put my beliefs in quite the same way as I did then. I'm sure you've had that same experience too. Still others were raised religious and find themselves questioning whether religion has any role in the modern world, and still others had no religious upbringing and find themselves inexorably drawn to spiritual community, especially in times like these.

And so, this place, Lake Street Church, in many ways is a creature of the spiritual journey. For some this place is a way station while they gather more data, for some it is a long-sought outpost of love and acceptance in a religious landscape that is based on judgment,

for others it is a fond home that has served them for decades, for still others it is a detour that will see them return to their religious roots at some point in the future. Whatever your journey, you are welcome here. I think it's fair to say that if this is the place that you've ended up, then you are a seeker of some kind. What makes seeking a sustainable endeavor, one that you can do for decades and not give up on it, is a community of people who support that same vision. I think we've got that here, I'm proud to say.

The point is – your story will have you going far from where you are, at some point, and there will also be those inevitable moments in your story like in any good fantasy story like Lord of the Rings, or Willow, or the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe, and of course, my favorite, Star Wars. Of course, you'll return home. And you'll realize that home didn't change because of your experiences with doubt, or depression, or trauma, but you changed, and now the world seems different. And now you think about where you were differently. You've learned much – some of what you learn will be stabilizing and make sense, and some of what you learn in the moment may have to sit on the back-burner for a few decades in order for you to put that knowledge back in place. Our story is always but unfolding, adding new chapters and giving new plot lines for us to follow. That's the wonder of being alive. Our story continues on and we even get to read some parts of our past while we are here. Re-reading, changing, growing.

Doing that as a community means having compassion for people's different parts of their story, for being aware that others may not share your unique set of experiences that led to your spirituality. It means supporting people in finding new language to name the Divine, even when that language doesn't work for you. It means helping people to integrate their whole selves with their spiritual life in community, instead of being told to check a part of themselves at the door. Most of all, I think it means a humility about the nature of the journey, how nothing is ever written in stone, how revisions happen, and how around the next turn their could be a shake up. It also means wonder, I think, that around the next corner there could be anything. It's a big world out there, it's a big world in here, too. I wish you much joy and peace in your journey.

Blessed Be.